

**Illuminating the mediating function of mythology
in twentieth- and twenty-first-century British art
music through spatial form analysis**

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Declaration

I, Jessica Louise Williams, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Williams', with a stylized, cursive script.

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Abstract

Mythic opera became an exemplary site of ideology with Wagner, bequeathing an important legacy for twentieth-century British composers that is not yet fully appreciated. This thesis investigates the role of mythology in mediating aspects of the ‘universal’ as expressed in twentieth- and twenty-first-century British art music, and individual subjectivity, focusing specifically on three case studies: Tippett’s *King Priam* (1958-62), Vaughan Williams’s *Job: A Masque for Dancing* (1931), and Maxwell Davies’s *Sea Orpheus* (2009). The central contention of the thesis is that inherent in mythological materials is the potential for mediation not only of ideological constructs and the realities of life in British society, but also of aspects of human experience which we are ordinarily unable to rationalize and comprehend; further that the foundational mythology of these three works is vital to their comprehensive understanding by contemporary and more modern readers. The methodological approach is predicated on the hypothesis that spatial interpretation, formulated on the basis of the spatial form model of modernist literary theorist Joseph Frank, opens up a vital perspective on the reader’s individual, active engagement with myth, which illuminates its mediating function. The contrasting parameters of the sources for each work’s mythology – Greek epic, visual illustrations, and modern folk-poetry – are compared, as are the strikingly different musical language and compositional techniques of the composers, and various paratextual sources for the works, both musical and non-musical. The thesis concludes by demonstrating that despite the striking contrasts between the three works, they may be interpreted in complement to one other by expanding the horizon of analysis to encompass a revision of our concept

of the ideological space their composers inhabit within British musical modernism; and further reinforce the case for musicological study in which technical analysis and contextual history mediate one another, not only by design, but by their very definition.

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Part I

Introduction

Context for, and Outline of, the Thesis

‘The journey of life is the search for the self – for the personal myth which is veiled in the local and the immediate but which, on a deeper level, is but an expression of the world-myth – “monomyth”. To understand the monomyth, to relate to it meaningfully, is to create a mythic consciousness and by so doing to rejoin the real forces from which our modern age of reason and technocracy has done so much to remove us.’ – David Adams Leeming.¹

In the post-Wagnerian intellectual space inhabited by British composers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the complex concept of myth is vital to our engagement with their works. This engagement takes place on two levels: specifically in terms of mythological content, whether or not this is depicted through staged drama of some form; but also more broadly in terms of our meta-theoretical understanding of the processes by which art, and especially music, mediates subjectivity. In our own quest for self-understanding, interactions with expressions of the Other provide triangulation points, enabling us to locate our own identity through identification with, or against, aspects of individual and social experience, Adams Leeming’s ‘monomyth’. This thesis presents an intricate exploration of the mediating function of mythology in twentieth- and twenty-first-century British art music, offering an innovative method by which we might interrogate our engagement with the ‘monomyth’, manifested in its myriad varying forms, through the focal lens of music. Three case study works by three different composers, spanning a range of genres and a compositional period of 78 years are investigated in detail, in order to demonstrate the broad applicability of the method.

The first part of this thesis fulfills a broadly introductory function, and

¹David Adams Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero* (New York: OUP, 1998), 6.

consists of two sections: the present ‘Context for, and Outline of, the Thesis’; and Chapter 1 – ‘Spatial Form: From Literature to Music’, which outlines the methodological approach through which the research that has contributed to this thesis has been carried out. The present section elaborates the context in which this thesis is situated: it introduces the concept of myth as it is relevant here, preparing the ground for the challenging interrogation of its mediating function through twentieth- and twenty-first-century British art music which follows in Parts II – III, and demonstrating the immanence of the emergent *spatial* framework under which the chosen works from this repertory are investigated; and it reviews the extant scholarship on twentieth-century British musical modernism – highlighting in particular the transformation of the pastoral trope effected as adjunct to the broader cultural paradigm shift thrust upon Europe, and Britain (in a specific nationalist context), by the Great War – which forms the historiographical context for the present study. Finally, a detailed outline of the thesis is offered, in order to elucidate its structure, and guide the reader through its presentation.

The Psychological Quiddity of Myth

‘Of all the things in the world myth seems to be the most incoherent and inconsistent. Taken at its face value it appears as a confused web woven out of the most incongruous threads.’ – Ernst Cassirer.²

In order to interrogate the mediating function of mythology within twentieth- and twenty-first-century British art-musical culture, and further to critically examine certain mythological works from this repertory against paradigmatic conceptions of contemporary aesthetics, our first task must surely be to tackle the psychological quiddity of myth. Cassirer confirms that ‘we must know what myth is before we can explain how it works. Its special effects can only be accounted for if we have attained a clear insight into its general nature.’³ As we attempt to define the concept of myth, it becomes immediately evident that this ostensibly simple introductory question requires an answer that is anything but simple in its scope. The definition of the nature of myth is one that grows increasingly ineffable and elusive as the vast interdisciplinary field within which it is situated continues to expand and diversify.

The term mythology commonly calls to mind the fables of Ancient Greek culture;⁴ yet the Greeks themselves had no fixed equivalent of what we understand by this concept. Indeed, Thomas J. Sienkewicz observes that ‘the study of myth presents special problems of definition, because the semantic range of the English word ‘myth’ tends to be inclusive rather than exclusive’.⁵ ‘Myth’ is derived from the Greek *muthos*,

²Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1946), 37.

³Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 8.

⁴I am by no means implying here that Ancient Greek mythological tradition is somehow originary. I am simply commenting on a common association as an accessible route into the extremely complex and multifarious phenomenon at the heart of this thesis.

⁵Thomas J. Sienkewicz, *Theories of Myth: An Annotated Bibliography* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1997), 2.

which translates not only as ‘story or tale’, but also as ‘speech’, ‘utterance’, ‘debate’, ‘word’ and ‘truth’; its basic meaning derives in the notion of making a sound with the mouth, thus it can be considered ‘basic to human existence.’⁶ Even this list does not exhaust the contemporary meanings of the term. We also understand the word to refer to commonly held but fallacious beliefs or ideas; deliberate misrepresentations of the truth which may or may not serve a political purpose; fictitious or imaginary creatures or things; and an idealized conception of someone or something. It is clear, then, that the phenomenon of myth houses both performative - or drastic (myth as utterance) - and hermeneutic - or gnostic (myth as story) - functions. Carolyn Abbate is a strong advocate of the importance of the drastic, performative function of art, emphasizing the crucial dimension of performer/audience engagement with the work at hand in a polemic against isolated hermeneutics which alludes to the *creation* of meaning through the performative act.⁷ Interestingly, she states the impossibility of functional musicological reflection and analysis during performance, ‘while one is caught up in [music’s] temporal wake’⁸ – in this thesis, the inevitable fact of temporality in music’s performance will (harmlessly) be suspended, in order to focus on interpretation in a conceptual sense.

Most commonly, perhaps, myths are understood to be stories, and it is important here to define our terminology with some care. We must set out clear definitions of both ‘story’ and ‘plot’, in order that we convey the crucial distinction between the two drawn by Formalists: ‘story’ refers to the chronological sequence of events in a narrative; ‘plot’ alludes to the actual placement of these events within the

⁶Adams Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero*, 3.

⁷Carolyn Abbate, ‘Music: Drastic or Gnostic?’, *Critical Inquiry* 30/3 (2004), 505-36.

⁸Abbate, ‘Music: Drastic or Gnostic?’, 511.

structure of the work in question.⁹ Joseph Frank writes that ‘plots...seem to work *against* the flow of time and to keep alive, or to create, an indigenous kind of unity overarching and reshaping the constraints of pure temporal linearity.’¹⁰ Furthermore, tracing a narrative’s plot identifies the reader’s intended focus of attention, indicating the extent to which any interpretation is encouraged to deviate from a simple diachronic experience toward a synchronic apprehension of the text: ‘An event is a separable item for attention only after we characterize the point of view of the attending individual. To see events as defined only in terms of point of view shows how inextricably plot is bound up with all the features of a narration.’¹¹

Inherent in our common understanding of myth is a sense of transcendence, both of time and of place. Myth is perceived to have a certain antidotal quality; its timeless relevance somehow provides comfort against the teleological progression and development narratives which characterize our construction of history. As Philip Rahv notes: ‘Myth, the appeal of which lies precisely in its archaism, promises above all to heal the wounds of time. For the one essential function of myth stressed by all writers is that in merging past and present it releases us from the flux of temporality, arresting change in the timeless, the permanent, the ever-recurrent conceived as “sacred repetition” [...] The supra-temporality of myth provides the ideal refuge from history.’¹² Furthermore, myth carries (by no means straightforward) connotations of universality – it is often deemed to be accessible to and comprehensible by all,

⁹Joseph Frank, ‘Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Two [Three] Parts: Part I’, *The Sewanee Review* 53/2 (1945), 234.

¹⁰Joseph Frank, ‘Spatial Form: Thirty Years After’, *Spatial Form in Narrative*, eds. Jeffrey R. Smitten and Ann Daghistany (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 220.

¹¹Eric Rabkin, ‘Spatial Form and Plot’, *Spatial Form in Narrative*, 83.

¹²Philip Rahv, *The Myth and the Powerhouse* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), 6-11.

regardless of any otherwise exclusionary biological or social identifiers.¹³ Eric Gould has written that ‘we can find in myth whatever we want to say is essential about the way humans try to interpret their place on earth. Myth is a synthesis of values which uniquely manages to mean most things to most people.’¹⁴ He continues: ‘behind myth lies the ancient desire to make comprehensible that which is not in a shared language’;¹⁵ this reference to the untranslatability of that which myth exists to communicate points not to some form of experience limited in its expression by articulation in a particular language, but rather to an altogether different realm of experience, that of the unconscious. In sum then, we might characterize myth as static, unchanging, familiar, and reassuring, against history, which by the very nature of the concept is defined by change, progression (or regression) between series of events, unavoidably related to one another in terms of time, rather than space.

Gould writes that ‘mythological references in literature establish our psychological origins, or the structure of the collective unconscious. They can be said to reveal binary structures of thought, or fantasy-dislocation, or problem-reflection. They may ironically prefigure literary meaning, or act as the primary language of experience.’¹⁶ In this way, myths have the capacity, and indeed are existentially obliged, to communicate something which cannot be conveyed in any other manner, because it is experienced beyond the jurisdiction of linguistic expression. Gould characterizes this phenomenon in Lacanian terms as ‘that discourse which has “escaped” from the subject, which we produce without knowing why. It is the

¹³See further problematization of the idea of myth’s universalism at the end of this section.

¹⁴Eric Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 5.

¹⁵Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 32.

¹⁶Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 4.

language which we give birth to, which humanizes us, but which we cannot fully control, and which instead appears to control us [...] Thus Lacan's unconscious is everywhere present in speech. It is structured like a language, and in the analytic moment (for which we can read the moment of interpretation) is itself the absent element fully alluded to; it is the Nothing into which we project our Being.¹⁷ Myth can thus be said to mediate between a self-aware individual and a broader psychosocial category, thereby objectifying collective experience.¹⁸

Intricately bound up with any definition of myth is the identification of archetypes. An archetype might be described as the location, within definable parameters, of the epitomic characteristics of someone or something. Archetypes can be identified within myths, or they may be synonymous with the concept of myth itself: mythology is 'the expression in symbols and images of the most basic level of the human psyche.'¹⁹ Following C. G. Jung, we might assert the function of archetypes as fulfilling our desire to comprehend that which is beyond our immediate experience, which Gould describes as 'the surplus of meaning, the urge for transcendence, inherent in symbolic discourse.'²⁰ Furthermore, we can identify in mythic archetypes overlaid interpretative patterns, inviting the reader to quest for this unknown quantity which cannot be expressed in linguistic terms.²¹ Jungian theory extensively elaborates the function of archetypes as images of the unconscious, associating 'archetypes and the collective unconscious/myth with the process of education and individuation.'²² As we gain visions of the collective unconscious through archetypal images in myth, we are

¹⁷Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 74-75.

¹⁸Rahv, *The Myth and the Powerhouse*, 12.

¹⁹Adams Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero*, 8.

²⁰Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 19.

²¹Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 69-70.

²²Adams Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero*, 4.

increasingly able to position ourselves in relation to what we are coming to understand as common aspects of human experience.

Adams Leeming describes our interpretation of myth as ‘an embodiment of universal truths about the human experience.’²³ The terms ‘universal’ and ‘truths’ in Adams Leeming’s statement are both problematic. For the purposes of this thesis, any mention of universality employs the term simply as a best approximation of the transferability of myth outside the context of the specific cultural deployment of any of its individual instantiations. Its field of reference is limited to the basic essential components of the particular mythology in question, the underlying tropes, rather than any particular stories, that are more broadly accessible – themes such as birth, love, conflict, death and so on. However great social and cultural differences may be, there are basic aspects of human existence which are undeniably common to all, and the realization of that fact means something in itself even if identification goes no further than that. I interpret Adams Leeming’s reference to ‘truths’ to denote these same basic elements, but I will not use this term myself because of its obvious potential to reflect particular, subjective versions of those elements, while purporting to present them in an unappropriated form. Of course, regardless of what terminology we use, the inherent potential for wildly different interpretations of the same basic trope is huge, but this becomes less important within an analytical model that privileges the role of the reader in shaping interpretation. It is thus the concept of interpretation which is fundamental here, as Gould aptly summarizes: ‘What we consider essential about myth seems to me to be no more or less than its exemplary function of intending-to-interpret, whether its object is social compromise,

²³Sienkewicz, *Theories of Myth: An Annotated Bibliography*, 3.

the supernatural, questions covering the self and its place in the world, or those issues we think of as ultimate, unanswerable, and metaphysical. The need to interpret the nature of experience which we call myth results in commentary which, in reproducing that intent, can inevitably reach no conclusion other than its own necessity.’²⁴

The Mediating Function of Mythology

Having established a working definition of myth as the timeless, quasi-universal expression of aspects of human experience, translated from the collective unconscious in a form that allows the reader²⁵ to individuate him- or herself, the next logical question to pursue introduces the central concern of this thesis, namely *the mediating function of mythology*. Gould suggests that we might study ‘the ontological status of myth as part of a general theory of human expression’;²⁶ and Austin confirms that ‘myth purports to offer an adequate explanation for everything – for the elements and laws of nature, for social structures, ethics, and the dynamics of the individual psyche. The student of myth must, sooner or later, become a cosmologist since every myth both presupposes and illustrates a cosmology, as every fact presupposes a complete theoretical system.’²⁷ Thus myth codifies not only parts of the experience of being human, but also our attempts to understand the nature of that existence.

²⁴Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 34.

²⁵I employ this term in its broadest sense – to encompass audiences, listeners, and analysts within a paradigm that is also applicable to the other art-forms that are relevant to the discussion presented in this thesis. ‘Reader’ here is not intended to denote the subject who engages in the physical act of reading (whether of music or literature), but rather in a more inclusive sense, it refers to the individual who might interact with the works in question in any capacity. I use reader rather than a more passive term (such as receiver) as a constant reminder of the active nature of this role.

²⁶Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 3.

²⁷Norman Austin, *Meaning and Being in Myth* (University Park London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 2.

What is clear from contemporary scholarship on literary and dramatic adumbrations of mythological narratives, the major surviving source being Aristotle's *Poetics*, is that what we classify as myth possesses certain distinctive qualities, pre-eminently a deliberate distance between the fictional mythological world and the lived world of its interpreters. 'Once we accept that the semiological gap conditions all human attempts to reach the essential, then we realize that mythicity depends on being part of the ongoing process of making acts of interpretation in order to shorten the gap.'²⁸ This mediating function has facilitated myth's trans-historical relevance across the millennia, since mythic time is 'without definite articulation, confounding past, present and future in an undifferentiated unity.'²⁹ Cassirer adds another dimension to the explanation of myth's seemingly eternal relevance, writing that 'what matters [...] are not the empirical relations between causes and effects, but the intensity and depth with which human relations are felt.'³⁰ The vulnerability to which such endeavours render those who would undertake them posits an *a priori* emotional dimension to mythology as we experience it, through art; this is succinctly expressed by Victor Shklovsky: 'art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things.'³¹ The inescapability of this emotional experience is paramount to understanding both the potential hermeneutic content of a particular work, and how that content is rendered accessible to the reader, as Cassirer reminds us: 'States of feeling are not merely secondary and derived; they are not merely the qualities, modes, or functions of cognitive states. They are, on the contrary, primitive,

²⁸Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 44.

²⁹Rahv, *The Myth and the Powerhouse*, 14.

³⁰Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 40.

³¹Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (1917) ed. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.

autonomous, not reducible to intelligence, and able to exist outside it and without it.’³² Cassirer’s statement here ties in with the explanation of human emotional response provided by the affect theory of Silvan Tomkins, who argues that ‘the affect system is [...] the primary motivational system because without its amplification, nothing else matters – and with its amplification, anything else can matter.’³³ This is particularly relevant in the context of twentieth-century artworks, created within a social context characterized by fragmentation, conflict, change, and alienation.

Myth and History

Rahv writes that ‘the mythic is the polar opposite of what we mean by the historical, which stands for process, inexorable change, incessant permutation and innovation. Myth is reassuring in its stability, whereas history is that powerhouse of change which destroys custom and tradition in producing the future – the future that at present, with the fading away of the optimism of progress, many have learned to associate with the danger and menace of the unknown [...] In our time, the movement of history has been so rapid that the mind longs for nothing so much as something permanent to steady it. Hence what the craze for myth represents most of all is the fear of history.’³⁴ Something about the modern condition in particular compels individuals to search for the universal, the timeless and the enduring, but this observation is by no means limited to the experience of the twentieth century, as Joseph Frank asserts: ‘man’s relation to time is complex [...] The intolerable time of sheer chronicity creates

³²Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 29.

³³Silvan Tomkins, *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins (Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction)*, ed. E. Virginia Demos (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 87. See also Silvan Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition*, Volumes I and II (New York: Springer, 2008).

³⁴Rahv, *The Myth and the Powerhouse*, 6-7.

a problem that humanity has had to cope with since the beginning of *its* time; and humanity has done so either in the myths of its religions, or, when such “supreme fictions” no longer inspire faith, in the secular fictions of art and literature.’³⁵ It is precisely myth’s atavistic quality, which isolates it in far remove from the immediate experience of the present in which it is manifested, that allows it to persistently function within temporally defined historical moments.³⁶ Looking to mythological artworks for a source of validation against the seeming inescapability of fate, in the sense of teleological continuum, the reader finds a ‘mythic time, [which] is without definite articulation, confounding past, present and future in an undifferentiated unity, as against historical time which is unrepeatable and of an ineluctable progression. The historical event is that which occurs once only, unlike the timeless event of myth that, recurring again and again, is endlessly present.’³⁷ We might more productively use the term ‘mythic depth’, rather than ‘mythic time’ here, in order to distinguish two different planes, as opposed to two different perspectives on the same plane. Mythic depth extends a perpendicular viewpoint to that of historical teleology, opening up a perspective which we might more usefully see as complementary, rather than conflicting. Both Sartre and Marx have asserted dialectical history as a replacement for mythology; by contrast, Lévi-Strauss demonstrates that the two may fruitfully co-exist ‘on a continuum [...] by offering a coding of moments in time.’ Both myth and history, then, enable the subject to perceive the world around him/her in relation to both time and space: ‘Like [...] myth, the aim of [dialectical] history can be envisaged as the attempt to “grasp the world as both a synchronic and a diachronic

³⁵Frank, ‘Spatial Form: Thirty Years After’, 218.

³⁶See applied discussion of this question in relation to Tippet’s choice of mythological setting in *King Priam* in Chapter 2, section 2.4.1.

³⁷Rahv, *The Myth and the Powerhouse*, 14.

totality”.³⁸

The Reader of Mythological Artworks

As will become clear, while myth exists as a medium of expression for the collective unconscious, the role of the individual as interpreter is paramount. Adams Leeming identifies a parallel between the content of the collective unconscious and the idea of self-discovery on the part of the individual: ‘The journey of life is the search for the self – for the personal myth which is veiled in the local and the immediate but which, on a deeper level, is but an expression of the world myth.’³⁹ Austin confirms the importance of myth as the vehicle through which we are able, as individuals, to undertake (whether consciously or subconsciously) this process of simultaneous identification with and deliberate distancing from ‘the human’:

As long as we continue to be sentient beings we shall continue to need myth, since myth is the primary ground on which we articulate our experience of ourselves in our social and natural environment. The imagination, a plastic medium, receives impressions from the archetypal forms of nature, and by an active force realizes those impressions in its own forms, as images, symbols, and ideas. The imagination projects, for our contemplation, the archetypal images of our human experience in the world; in addition, like a transformer, it translates the ineffable forms of nature into structures and images so that the ineffable may become articulated in consciousness.⁴⁰

This process is far from simple, however. Understanding ourselves necessarily requires the discovery and comprehension of, and self-positioning in relation to, what is to be identified as the ‘Other’; that is, reviewing our own ideology, the structure of our own world-view, through a process of psychological self-analysis. This undertaking involves

³⁸Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 106.

³⁹Adams Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero*, 6.

⁴⁰Austin, *Meaning and Being in Myth*, 5-6.

a dialectical exchange with mythology itself, concluding with a stage of compromise in which we comprehend and may thus assimilate facets of the Other into our own self-consciousness:

Myth, though determined in its form by its immediate historical context, transcends any historical moment, being at the fundamental level the quest for the self. But the self is the most problematic of terms, which proliferates in all directions, cloaks itself in manifold disguises, and creates a multitude of images to fascinate or deceive the hunter [...] The self cannot, as Dewey remarked, find its unity in itself alone, but must achieve this unity only in transcending itself. Or, in Hegel's terms, the self cannot achieve self-consciousness without the consciousness of the Other. Lacan put the problem in another way; the individual self must find itself through the network of signifiers, which, being already culturally determined, are in the field of the Other. Thus the self discovers itself only in alienation [...] The self searches for the authentic subject, but this subject lies hidden in the alien field of the Other. Seeing intimations of the subject everywhere, but finding the subject nowhere, the self projects another and larger self as the subject; that is, the gods, through whom it can envision and realize itself. The gods of myth and religion, who enjoy the fullness of Being, suffering neither the hazards of time nor the anguish of self-consciousness, are at the first level the signifiers of that absolute Other, inscrutable and inaccessible. Like the superego in Freud's psychic cosmology, the gods stand guard to prohibit the ego from trespassing its limits, and thus mark the ego's terrible alienation from Being. But the function of the gods is not only punitive. The gods also are the signifiers that bridge the chasm between the self and the Other. Standing in the field of the Other, the gods are the sympathetic witnesses to the self's travail as it moves from object-consciousness, at the first level of consciousness, to full self-consciousness.⁴¹

Myth, then, is characterized as simultaneously representative of that which we cannot reach and comprehend, and constitutive of the bridge between that with which we are familiar and which we can easily identify in ourselves, and that which we cannot know, but which we *must* know in order fully to achieve self-conscious identity. This bridging mythology thus manifests itself in innumerate variations, each with a unique contour, since the void which it traverses is necessarily delineated by the individual subject who would engage with it. The reader cannot simply 'cross'

⁴¹Austin, *Meaning and Being in Myth*, 2-3.

the bridge, however. They must rather complete its construction by actively engaging with the mythology with which they are presented, and by offering something of their own known identity to the mediation process, launching the dialectical exchange.

Mythology as Social Metonymy

As individual readers, we experience myth most commonly through artworks – literature, visual art, music. When considering any such work, we must also take into account its creative context, which we may use to ‘explore, analyse and define the prominent structural features of its epoch.’ According to Structuralist thought, ‘any system – literary, economic, political, religious – is a metonymy for the aggregate of other communicate systems inside a historical and cultural context’;⁴² thus we may discern a great deal about the society in which the mythic artwork has been created by analyzing the work in question on these terms. Mythic artworks thus draw together specific historical moments (the context of their creation, and that in which the reader is experiencing them), and a sense of timeless relevance (constituted within their mythological materials), demanding of the reader a double focus on both the immediate here and now, and the broader picture: ‘The cumulative reading of the myth reduces itself to certain common elements of the plot [narrative, in my model]. These semantic units – mythemes or sentences – can reveal a structure to myth which is both historically conditioned (that is, the history of the myth provides its own context) and metaphorically open-ended (we must interpret it now) [...] Myth is the intersection of learned social and cultural values *and* poetic meaning.’⁴³ This

⁴²Ronald Foust, ‘The Aporia of Recent Criticism and the Contemporary Significance of Spatial Form’, *Spatial Form in Narrative*, 200.

⁴³Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 101.

double-focus, the concatenation of timeless mythic existence which itself conflates ideas of past, present, and future, and interpretation in a specific historical moment, or series of discrete moments, lies at the heart of the invective presented in this thesis to consider myth, and its function in art, within an alternative, *spatial*, paradigm. It is only by embracing the spatial paradigm, I will argue, that we might properly come to understand the mediating function of mythology in art, and specifically in music, by destabilizing its more ontic claims in order to examine its phenomenal functions.

By extension, we may also consider the deliberate harnessing of mythic material by creative artists whose intention is to convey some form of social commentary through their work. Jung writes of the imperative to look beyond biographical details of a creator's existence, to the broader relevance of their portrayal of mythic tropes in the specific context in which their works are received: 'Great poetry draws its strength from the life of mankind, and we completely miss its meaning if we try to derive it from personal factors. Whenever the collective unconscious becomes a living experience and is brought to bear upon the conscious outlook of an age, this event is a creative act which is of importance for a whole epoch. A work of art is produced that may truthfully be called a message to generations of men.'⁴⁴ The artistic presentation of mythological material in literature, music or visual art is a vital aspect of our discernment of social comment, or political message, in mythic narrative. Gould writes that myth itself 'tends to function more as a message from society to its members', whereas an artwork based on myth 'tends to function more as a message from an individual to society.' However, in attempting to define the ontological status of a mythological artwork, we must remain aware of the perils

⁴⁴Carl Gustav Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 15 (London: Routledge, 1966), 98.

of attempting to ascertain authorial intent, and necessarily return to the fact that the reader is to a far greater extent responsible for the specific determination and realization of a work's hermeneutic content:

Signification is, as always, dependent on interpretation. Hermeneutics [...] is not incompatible with Structuralism. The poem functions as part of the sign-vehicle 'poetry' as much as a mythic narrative functions as 'myth'. But in order to be meaningful, each cannot merely be 'poetry' or 'myth', but *a* poem and *a* myth. What they have in common is the paradoxical function of discourse which leaves myth and literature on a linguistic continuum. Myth can only develop a plot and approach the condition of a self-conscious literary work. And the poem (or, of course, fiction [or music, we might add]), beginning from the other end of the continuum with its emphasis on form, must use only received signs, and therefore approach the universal and the condition of myth. Even then, the received sign is never fully absorbed or destroyed. The importance of the social context of myth and literature, which cannot be denied, is entirely dependent on this dialectic.⁴⁵

In examining the potential political function of the works under investigation in this thesis, the focus will be on the extent to which potential political content can be read in these mythic artworks, rather than any preoccupation with attempting to determine absolutes of compositional intent.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 112-113.

⁴⁶Discussion of myth's function as an effective mode of immanent critique is picked up again in each case study; cf. chapter 3 - section 3.5, chapter 4 - section 4.3, chapter 5 - section 5.4.2.

Historiographical Context: British Musical Modernism in the Twentieth Century

We now move on to consider the historiographical context for the present study, surveying extant scholarship on twentieth-century British musical modernism, and focusing particularly on the post-WWI reconfiguration of the pastoral poetic mode, with its important implications for the nature, shape, and nationalist associations of British musical composition thereafter. No discussion of ‘art’ music of the twentieth-century can reasonably avoid the enduring yet elusive concept of ‘modernism’, which has traditionally been defined in a certain, specific way (see below). The social, political and cultural realities of the twentieth century, however, circumscribe a uniquely complex milieu in which a plethora of modernisms have emerged, co-existed and mutated across all areas of human existence; thus this multivalent concept remains central to historiographical enquiry relating to this period, particularly that of an explicitly interdisciplinary kind.

Traditionally defined artistic modernism, identifiable in the pre- and post-WWI repertory, and still viewed by the majority as the arbiter of the concept, was predicated on the following principles:

Success with the established audience of one’s time was not a criterion of aesthetic merit or historical significance. Legitimate originality in art was inherently progressive, oppositional and critical. It pierced the surface of reigning tastes, undermined them and revealed hidden truths and profound historical currents. Art true to its own time, whether called modern or the artwork of the future, forged a leading edge in history; it constituted a prophetic force for change often rejected by contemporary critics and connoisseurs [...] The aesthetic reaction to modernity reflected not only enthusiasm but ambivalence and anxiety [...] Nevertheless, the shared assumption surrounding the subsequent debates over Modernism was that the present was far more radical in its contrasts with the immediate past than previous periods had been. Therefore the historical tastes and aesthetic styles characteristic

of much mid- and late-19th-century painting, architecture and music were rejected. Overt departures from immediate historical precedents became hallmarks of early Modernism. Furthermore, given a pervasive sense of dread about societal and cultural consequences of modernity, the subjective experience of the artist, at the moment, became increasingly glorified. In this regard, early Modernism was indebted to turn-of-the-century advances in painting, particularly Impressionism and Expressionism.⁴⁷

The music of those composers who have traditionally been described as modernist was characterized by a rejection of the compositional techniques and languages of nineteenth-century Romanticism, employing new technologies, innovative formal structures based on a reconfiguration of tonality and dissonance, and a new approach to rhythm and metre which harnessed irregularity and disruption as its overarching characteristics in response to what Botstein describes as a demand for ‘the shattering of expectations, conventions, categories, boundaries and limits as well as empirical experimentation (following the example of science) and the confident exploration of the new.’⁴⁸

The few traditional studies of British musical modernism place the concept within a smaller delineated period from the mid-century, lagging decades (and two devastating global conflicts) behind the European precedent, and restrict its definition, discussion, and critique to specifics of musical composition, articulated through a series of identifiable musical techniques and devices which are grouped neatly as a modernist musical language. Such studies are short-sighted at best. Byron Adams quotes Ralph Vaughan Williams to this precise effect: ‘Modernity does not depend on certain tricks of diction but on the relationship between the mind that expresses

⁴⁷Leon Botstein, ‘Modernism’, *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed November 2, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40625>.

⁴⁸Botstein, ‘Modernism’.

and the means of expression. The modern mind needs a modern vocabulary, but the vocabulary will not make the modern mind.’⁴⁹ Richard Taruskin takes up this mantle, with reference to Benjamin Britten, writing of the composer’s tendency to thematize non-explicitly, through his musical works, his personal, troubled social experience as ‘an aspect of modernity, and a particularly compelling one, that transcends the narrowly stylistic issues to which discussions of musical modernity are often confined.’⁵⁰

The implicit connection with the post-war European avant-garde is especially misleading; the terms ‘avant-garde’ and ‘modernist’ are not synonymous. Philip Rupprecht illustrates this error with the cases of Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett; these are figures strongly dissociated with *the* ‘avant-garde’ in the period following the end of the Second World War, yet recent scholarship has demonstrated strong identifications with modernism within the personal philosophy and musical oeuvres of both of these British composers. Britten, in particular, stands out as a modern composer with strong emergent modernist themes in his work – themes which in many cases transcend the simply musical, and involve modernist sensibilities in a broader sense as allegorical devices and tropes, whose expression is not hindered by Britten’s lack of concern for an avant-garde musical language of any variety. Similarly, Anthony Barone concludes that the ‘underlying modernist impulse’ in Ralph Vaughan Williams’s Fourth Symphony is neither dependent upon nor expressed through ‘avant-garde technique’; yet it is still undeniably present.⁵¹ And J.P.E. Harper-Scott presents the same work as a satiric take on both modernist and

⁴⁹Ralph Vaughan Williams, quoted in Byron Adams ‘Foreword’, *Musical Quarterly* 91/1-2 (2008), 1.

⁵⁰Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, Vol. 5 (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 249.

⁵¹Anthony Barone, ‘Modernist Rifts in a Pastoral Landscape: Observations on the Manuscripts of Vaughan Williams’ Fourth Symphony’, *Musical Quarterly* 91/1-2, (2008), 63.

classical compositional aesthetics, which eschews definitive association with either label. By mimicking modernist technique within a recognisably traditional context, Harper-Scott argues, the work withholds allegiance to the modernist paradigm; yet the adoption of modernist techniques as a mode of criticism simply serves to situate the work firmly *within* the discourse it is attempting to escape.⁵²

Until recently, narratives of twentieth-century musical history have tended to focus their discussion on musical works, composers and movements with explicitly revolutionary, reactionary, or rejectionist motives. Such impulses, while varied in their articulation, stem in the majority from a central concern with tonality, arguably the structural backbone of Western art music during the preceding millennium. As Peter Franklin comments, ‘significant amongst exclusions [from modernist musical discourse] were the very spheres of musical-cultural practice in which tonality had manifestly not “collapsed”, been superseded by serialism, or disfigured and ironised in the modes of ostensibly “wrong-note” tonal pastiche found in Stravinsky’s neoclassicism, Prokofiev, “Les Six” in Paris, and later Hindemith.’⁵³ Barone, too, writes of the ‘crucial modernist conundrum of “authenticity”’, with its ‘judgement against themes that were “nice”’; for which one may reasonably read ‘tonal’.⁵⁴ To these exclusions I would also add the majority of the British canon; composers such as Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Arthur Bliss, William Walton, Michael Tippett, Benjamin Britten and Elisabeth Lutyens have only recently been deemed worthy of investigation under the auspices of modernism, and even so, a peculiarly *British*

⁵²J.P.E. Harper-Scott, ‘Vaughan Williams’s Antic Symphony’, *British Music and Modernism 1895–1960*, ed. Matthew Riley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 175–96.

⁵³Peter Franklin, ‘Between the wars: traditions, modernisms, and “the little people from the suburbs”’, *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 190.

⁵⁴Barone, ‘Modernist Rifts in a Pastoral Landscape’, 74.

modernism, definitively distinct from that of Continental Europe. Jennifer Doctor and Daniel Albright excoriate established perceptions of twentieth-century modernism which ‘extol creative extremes’,⁵⁵ and “‘test the limits of aesthetic construction”’,⁵⁶ as if these were the sole indicators of the concept’s cultural and philosophical presence. Doctor asserts the need for scholarship to accept that ‘in music, as in the sister arts, modernism of this period consists not just of extremes, but also of other thoroughly modern layers of activity.’⁵⁷

Intellectual and cultural elitism, manifested through modes of abstraction, constitutes an additional important feature of traditional constructions of twentieth-century modernism. In the Adornian view, cultural products which catered to the indiscriminate tastes of the uneducated masses were deemed invalid, and high modernist aesthetics, inasmuch as they can be deemed to have existed as some kind of common philosophy, might be said to have projected individualism through obfuscation and complexity. Furthermore, as an anxious or critical response to what is usually figured in negative terms (most likely influenced by the devastation of the Great War) as the condition of modernity, modernist artworks often espouse expressionist extremes, disengaging from the abhorrent aspects of reality through isolation, and escapism.⁵⁸ The vital intellectual dimension to modernism was promoted shamelessly; the author of a 1912 article suggests that the ‘intellectual

⁵⁵Jennifer Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of “British Musical Modernism”’, *Musical Quarterly* 91/1-2 (2008), 90.

⁵⁶Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 29; quoted in Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 90.

⁵⁷Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 110.

⁵⁸Throughout this discussion, I employ the term ‘modernity’ to refer to the modern era, i.e. an historical period. The term ‘modernism’ is used to refer to a distinct cultural phenomenon, which I postulate arose and developed in response to the social, economic and political parameters that defined that era.

remove of the modernist' may be discerned in the music of Edward Elgar.⁵⁹ The intellectual distance associated with modernist art situates exponent works at one end of Hermann Danuser's artistic continuum, where 'the possibility of aesthetic autonomy, with works heard in relative independence of the external circumstances of their genesis' stands in opposition to 'functional works, bound explicitly to their local context.'⁶⁰ Philip Rupprecht, a representative of the permeation of historicist self-awareness in current musicology, asserts, however, that 'the notion of music's cultural autonomy [...] was by the mid-century itself ideologically marked';⁶¹ that is, no cultural product is free from contextual association, and any attempts to declare to the contrary must themselves be scrutinised for political motive. In retrospect, we may now observe that the 'notion of retreat from ideological signification advanced in 1950s discourses of abstraction was itself suffused with ideology';⁶² Anne Shreffler asserts that 'aesthetic autonomy' in the post-war period was 'an intentionally oppositional stance';⁶³ but we might also view this heightened self-awareness as a defensive strategy.

Modernism as Response to the Condition of Modernity

Modernism, as a cultural, aesthetic or philosophical phenomenon, is by definition tied to the circumstances motivating its existence, and, as such, modernist artworks cannot be definitively abstracted from their origins. Indeed several scholars characterise

⁵⁹Charles Edward McGuire, 'Edward Elgar: "Modern" or "Modernist"? Constructions of an Aesthetic Identity in the British Music Press, 1895-1934', *Musical Quarterly* 91/1-2 (2008), 17.

⁶⁰Philip Rupprecht, '"Something Slightly Indecent": British composers, the European Avant-Garde, and National Stereotypes in the 1950s', *Musical Quarterly* 91/3-4, (2008), 280.

⁶¹Rupprecht, '"Something Slightly Indecent"', 280.

⁶²Rupprecht, '"Something Slightly Indecent"', 312.

⁶³Anne C. Shreffler, 'Ideologies of Serialism: Stravinsky's *Threni* and the Congress for Cultural Freedom,' *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity*, ed. Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 238.

modernism, in any or all of its extant realisations, as a *response* to something else, or as a challenge to which artists had to respond, both of which are consistently, but not exclusively, figured as the condition of modernity itself. Barone states that ‘British composers [...] responded variously to the claims of modernism’,⁶⁴ and Eric Saylor compares British composers with their continental counterparts, observing that ‘unlike artists in most other Western European nations, English composers often responded to the pressures of modernism (musical and otherwise) in ways that might at first appear quite unadventurous when considered against contemporaneous developments in Germany, Austria and France.’⁶⁵ Rupprecht too writes of British composers struggling to ‘respond meaningfully to post-war avant-garde developments’ in central Europe.⁶⁶ The relatively recent acknowledgement of the vital social dimension of modernist art is emphasized through comparison to contemporary attitudes on the subject, such as the purported views of the American public in the immediate post-war period, for whom ‘advanced music was figured as “Marxist”, “rationalist” and “unintelligible”’. Rupprecht comments that this reflects a ‘generalised mid-century dissociation of scientific and artistic thought into two “cultures”, parallel, but non-intersecting.’⁶⁷

Attempting to define modernism remains difficult, even once we have disclaimed its plurality, restricted and de-restricted its temporal span, and offered

⁶⁴Barone, ‘Modernist Rifts in a Pastoral Landscape’, 62.

⁶⁵Eric Saylor, “‘It’s not lambkins frisking at all’: English pastoral music and the Great War’, *Musical Quarterly* 91/1-2 (2008), 41.

⁶⁶Rupprecht, “‘Something Slightly Indecent’”, 276.

⁶⁷Rupprecht, “‘Something Slightly Indecent’”, 278-9.

a brief critique of its traditional conceptions.⁶⁸ Doctor offers an explanation penned by Susan Stanford Friedman: ‘Modernism would seem to be the point at which the idea of the radical and innovating arts, the experimental, technical, aesthetic ideal that had been growing forward from Romanticism, reaches formal crisis – in which myth, structure and organisation in a traditional sense collapse, and not only for formal reasons. The crisis is a crisis of culture.’⁶⁹ I would like to focus on three points here. Firstly, the implication that the arts progress in an inherently teleological way not only suggests that an awareness of the past is crucial to understanding what happens next, but further reinforces the view that modernism is a response to a specific event, or perhaps a more enduring condition caused by that event.⁷⁰ In order to reflect critically on the dialogue between past, present, and future, as drawn into parallel by the alignment of event and response, an alternative *spatial* perspective is required, in which distracting dynamics of precedence and subsequence are muted, allowing the revelation of deeper hermeneutic considerations. Secondly, I suggest that modernism is *not* the organic, natural succession in a linear developmental narrative,

⁶⁸While the modernism debate is unavoidable given the chronological and geographical context in which the works under scrutiny in this thesis were composed, it is not the central focus of the arguments to be made here. Under pressures of space it has only been possible to dip and in out of the discussion at various relevant junctures, but for a wider view of the whole debate, *cf.* such recent studies as Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso Books, 2012); Philip Rupprecht, *British Musical Modernism: The Manchester Group and their Contemporaries* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015); Ben Earle, *Luigi Dallapiccola and Musical Modernism in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013); J. P. E. Harper-Scott, *The Quilting Points of Musical Modernism: Revolution, Reaction, and William Walton* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012).

⁶⁹Susan Stanford Friedman, ‘Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern / Modernity / Modernism’, *Modernism/Modernity* 8/3 (2001), 494–95; quoted in Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 91.

⁷⁰To avoid any misconception, I use the terms event and response here in a general sense, rather than as deployed by Alain Badiou in his *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, tr. Alberto Toscano (London, New York: Continuum, 2009, published in French 2006), despite the potential similarity of definition.

but rather the evidence that that narrative *has failed*: in a sense, modernism is that which fills the void left by the lack of continuation of a developmental artistic and aesthetic narrative. Finally, the expression ‘crisis of culture’ points to the inherent social dimension to modernist art, cementing the impossibility of discussing such works in isolation from their socio-political and cultural contexts.

The Great War as Pivot Point

Having acknowledged the seemingly paradoxical social delineation (in that it is a response to social conditions, but aesthetically eschews extra-musical contextualization) of twentieth-century modernism, we might then speculate as to the cause of the crisis that motivated its birth. The dual identity of the Great War as both a culmination of mounting social and political tensions in Europe around the turn of the century, and a launch point for a new era, is epitomized in Malcolm Bradbury’s description of the conflict as ‘the apocalypse that leads the way into Modernism.’⁷¹ Franklin writes of the unimagined, and total, devastation caused by the war, ‘physically, psychologically and sociologically, Europe was scarred by the First World War in ways that had not begun to be envisaged at its outset in 1914.’⁷² Sandra M. Gilbert describes the Great War as ‘its age’s most transformative cultural cataclysm’,⁷³ while Byron Adams, wary of the ‘naïve insouciance’ with which the term is often misused, recognises the ‘fundamental changes in the social, artistic and

⁷¹Malcolm Bradbury, ‘The Denuded Place: War and Form in *Parade’s End* and *U.S.A.*’, *The First World War Fiction*, ed. Holger Klein (London, 1976), 193-4; referenced in Sandra M. Gilbert, ‘“Rats’ Alley”: The Great War, Modernism and the (Anti) Pastoral Elegy’ *New Literary History* 30/1 (1999), 183.

⁷²Franklin, ‘Between the wars’, 189.

⁷³Gilbert, ‘“Rats’ Alley”’, 193.

political life of the British nation' caused by the conflict as 'a true paradigm shift'.⁷⁴ Charles Edward McGuire reports a corresponding view of modernism in contemporary literature, wherein the most uncompromising authors saw it as 'the ultimate aesthetic paradigm shift.'⁷⁵

Doctor confirms the non-existence of identifiably (in traditional terms⁷⁶) modernist musical composition in Britain prior to the Great War, writing instead of the traditions embodied in the works of Elgar, and thus invested in him as a national icon, and citing the only modernising influences tangible in music as those resulting from advances in audio technologies.⁷⁷ After the war, however, a sense that reality as one knew it had been fundamentally and irreparably altered articulated itself in altogether new sensibilities. Michael Levenson writes of such preoccupations as 'the recurrent act of fragmenting unities [...] the use of mythic paradigms, the refusal of norms of beauty, the willingness to make radical [...] experiment.'⁷⁸ However, we must acknowledge again the multiplicity of movements towards modernism and note that such precepts neither constituted an agreed aesthetic philosophy, nor were found, either together or separately, in all so-called modernist artworks, as Franklin comments, 'from the beginning of the interwar period, the myth of an artistic modernism embracing common objectives is dispelled by closer consideration

⁷⁴Adams, 'Foreword', 4.

⁷⁵McGuire, 'Edward Elgar: "Modern" or "Modernist"?', 21.

⁷⁶This position has been re-thought in the recent wave of British modernist studies, including such works as J. P. E. Harper-Scott's *Edward Elgar, Modernist* (Cambridge and New York: CUP, 2006); the special 'British Modernism' issue of *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 91 No. 1/2 (2008); and Matthew Riley (ed.), *British Music and Modernism, 1895–1960* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), particularly relevant here is Daniel M. Grimley's chapter 'Landscape and Distance: Vaughan Williams, Modernism and the Symphonic Pastoral'.

⁷⁷Doctor, 'The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism', 89-90.

⁷⁸Michael Levenson (ed.), 'Introduction', *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.

of its protagonists' circumstances, politics and affiliations.'⁷⁹ Morag Schiach reports a developing historical perspective on modernism in the immediate post-war period, as 'first [...] a point of resistance to the instrumentality and alienation of modern life and culture and then as a compensatory aesthetic and even ethical alternative to modernity's fragmentation and incoherence.'⁸⁰

Such was the striking dichotomy between the pre-war and post-war worlds, that Seamus Heaney is moved to invoke a line from the Brian Friel play *Translations* to articulate the expressionistic change necessitated by this transformed social reality: 'It can sometimes happen that a civilisation becomes imprisoned in a linguistic contour that no longer matches the landscape of fact.'⁸¹ Friel's use of the words 'civilisation', 'imprisoned', and 'landscape' seem particularly apt in this context: pre-war society is often figured as civilized by default in opposition to the uncivilized nature of conflict during the war; British society struggled to cope with the reality of reconstruction in the aftermath of the war, and thus modernism may be interpreted as an escape mechanism from a situation which had been thrust upon society and by which they were now in a sense trapped; and reference to landscape invokes a nationalist trope closely allied with notions of Englishness throughout the early twentieth century and arguably beyond. Indeed, Gilbert describes the aesthetic landscape during and immediately after the First World War as rather an 'anti-pastoral deathscape', in which 'what might in traditional pastoral elegy have portended rebirth instead signals

⁷⁹Franklin, 'Between the wars', 189.

⁸⁰Morag Schiach, 'Reading the Modernist Novel: An Introduction', *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 4.

⁸¹Brian Friel, *Translations* (London, 1981), 43; quoted in Seamus Heaney, 'Eclogues "In Extremis": On the Staying Power or the Pastoral', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 103C/1 (2003), 6.

dissolution.’⁸² Thus the ‘landscape’ is no longer recognisable; it is, in fact, a ‘No Man’s Land’.

Appropriation of the Pastoral Trope: Nostalgia as *katharsis*

The transformation and reconfiguration of the pastoral poetic mode as a result of the devastating impact of the Great War is especially relevant to the discussion of the mediating function of mythology in relation to British twentieth-century art music presented in this thesis. McGuire describes the pastoral as ‘one of the most important modernist tropes in the early years of the twentieth century.’⁸³ Here, he is referring to a rather colloquial pre-war view of the pastoral that pertains to images of rural England, being outdoors and a national connection with ‘the land’; Paul Alpers, however, informs us that this conception of the pastoral as primarily a ‘scenic mode’ becomes inaccurate after the war,⁸⁴ stating instead that ‘what is central to the pastoral is the figure of the herdsman and the poet’s self-representation as a herdsman and not, as is so often assumed, idyllic landscapes or settings.’⁸⁵ Arnold Whittall describes the difficulty with which scholars have approached English pastoral music of the twentieth century, suggesting that their problem lies within the tendency to define the music ‘more in terms of what it depicts than the way in which that depiction is musically achieved.’⁸⁶ The role of pastoral tropes in literary, visual and musical art changed

⁸²Gilbert, ‘“Rats’ Alley”’, 185.

⁸³McGuire, ‘Edward Elgar: “Modern” or “Modernist”?’, 19.

⁸⁴Paul Alpers, ‘“The Philoctetes Problem” and the Poetics of Pastoral’, *Representations, Special Issue: Music, Rhythm, Language* 86 (2004), 6.

⁸⁵Alpers, ‘“The Philoctetes Problem”’, 8.

⁸⁶Arnold Whittall, ‘The Signs of Genre: Britten’s Version of Pastoral,’ *Sundry Sorts of Music Books: Essays on the British Library Collections*, eds. Chris Banks, Arthur Searle, and Malcolm Turner (London: The British Library, 1993), 363; quoted in Saylor, ‘“It’s not lambkins frisking at all”’, 39.

irrevocably, in line with social and political developments, during the course of the Great War. Saylor asserts the now outdated nature of traditional conceptions of the pastoral, writing that the conflict ‘eradicated [...] the right to follow a pastoral muse’, and asking ‘what possible meaning could such Romantically-tinged scenes hold for those who had witnessed the excruciating, mechanically-aided birth of modernity?’ He describes academic treatment of the genre, in which the term ‘pastoral’ is ‘applied pejoratively by unsympathetic writers who imply or even state outright that such music as falls under its rubric is a reactionary mishmash of escapism, sentimentality and nostalgia.’⁸⁷ There is evidently a very strongly escapist tone to much modernist art; scholarly consensus heralds it as a response to a new world in which alienation, fragmentation and solitude reigned. Saylor later argues against his previous rhetoric of impossibility, challenging such traditional overly simplistic and narrow conceptions of the pastoral, and the limited application of its aesthetic associations. Over the last decade, he reports, the more complex and progressive nature of twentieth-century English pastoralism has begun to be recognised, and the musical riposte of English composers to the horrors of the Great War is now viewed as ‘a particular manifestation of pastoral music that bears characteristically modern connotations.’⁸⁸

Doctor asserts the necessity of understanding Susan Stanford Friedman’s notion of ‘parataxis’ for those wishing to investigate modernist aesthetics, defining the concept as ‘a common aesthetic strategy in modernist writing and art, developed to disrupt and fragment conventional sequencing, causality and perspective’.⁸⁹ The idea of a deliberate attempt to disturb traditional teleological narratives as being

⁸⁷Saylor, ‘“It’s not lambkins frisking at all”’, 40.

⁸⁸Saylor, ‘“It’s not lambkins frisking at all”’, 40-41.

⁸⁹Stanford Friedman, ‘Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern / Modernity / Modernism’; quoted in Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 91.

symptomatic of responses to the condition of modernity, points again to the immanent suitability of consideration of related artworks within an interpretative paradigm defined in *spatial*, rather than chronological, terms.⁹⁰ The formulation of the methodological approach of this thesis on the basis of a strand of modernist literary criticism is just one example of the myriad profitable comparisons between music and the other arts which may be of benefit in attempts to untangle the complex nexus of modernist aesthetics in the twentieth century. Terry Gifford's account of pastoralism in literature proves illuminating when its central tenets are applied to music by Saylor. In particular, his dismissal of what many see as inherent retrospection in the pastoral genre allows for the re-interpretation of depictions of quasi-Arcadian landscapes in English music during the first half of the twentieth century and beyond: 'To the extent that the pastoral represents an idealisation, it must also imply a better future conceived in the language of the present.'⁹¹ Saylor comments further: 'Pastoral language can gain power when Arcadia is positioned [...] as a brighter, more appealing world that exists parallel to, or interspersed within, the grimmer trappings of modernity [...] The attraction of the pastoral vision lies in part with the tantalising hope that certain aspects of it, if realised, could offer a reassuring alternative to modernity's less savoury elements.'⁹² Heaney is concerned to predicate the invalidity of the pastoral mode if either writer or audience fail to grasp the discord between 'the beautifully tinted literary map and the uglier shape that reality has taken in the world.'⁹³

⁹⁰The relevance of the concept of parataxis to the spatial form methodology developed and applied in this thesis will be discussed in the following chapter, in section 1.2.

⁹¹Terry Gifford, *Pastoral (The New Critical Idiom)* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1–8; quoted in Saylor, "It's not lambkins frisking at all", 44.

⁹²Saylor, "It's not lambkins frisking at all", 44.

⁹³Heaney, 'Eclogues: "In Extremis"', 6.

Christopher Butler argues that modernity consists of ‘two phases of innovation: that of radical change to the language of an art [...] followed by a more pragmatic, audience-oriented adaptation of new techniques, which often demands a highly allusive compromise with the past.’⁹⁴ It is this ‘highly allusive compromise with the past’ which is of interest at this particular juncture. Inherent in the established pastoral tradition, across all the arts, is a perceived sense of nostalgia, whether this manifests itself in an expression of longing for the mythical Arcadia, or merely a simpler, less troubled period in a nation’s history and cultural heritage. Literary critic Peter Marinelli cites pastoral poetry’s overriding characteristic as being ‘that it is written when an ideal or at least more innocent world is felt to be lost, but not so wholly as to destroy the memory of it or to make some imaginative intercourse between present reality and past perfection impossible [...] Nostalgia cannot be the emotion of those who are not conscious of having experienced a loss.’⁹⁵ Thus in the newly transformed post-war pastoral, created in the aftermath of loss on a then unprecedented scale, nostalgia may still be identified. One might even identify it in the self-conscious rejection of reminiscence; by acknowledging that the extant framework has a contour that no longer matches the landscape of fact, artists were remembering, presumably fondly by comparison with the present-day, the pre-war society in which they had lived, and envisaging it, through *spatial* comparison, as a potential better alternative to the present. As Friedrich Schiller writes, ‘all peoples who possess a history have a paradise, a state of innocence, a golden age [...] Experience itself therefore supplies

⁹⁴Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music, and Painting in Europe, 1900–1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 258; quoted in Saylor, “‘It’s not lambkins frisking at all’”, 45.

⁹⁵Peter Marinelli, *Pastoral, The Critical Idiom*, gen. ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1971), 9; quoted in Saylor, “‘It’s not lambkins frisking at all’”, 49.

enough for the depiction of [that] which the pastoral idyll treats.’⁹⁶

Butler’s compromise then, perhaps lies in the rationalisation of this nostalgia; acknowledging its connotations, and yet re-shaping them to new effect. Gilbert illustrates this theory in relation to poetry, writing that while Jay Winter is correct in observing that the First World War (re)generated a ‘complex traditional vocabulary of mourning, derived from classical, Romantic or religious forms’,⁹⁷ poets were at the same time ‘forced to demystify and desacralise’, sacrificing the established redemptive view of death embodied in the pastoral elegy just as those fighting in the combat sacrificed their own lives for the modern world, ‘those elements [...] appear to have been as definitively obliterated by the war as were the bodies of millions of mortally wounded combatants.’⁹⁸ McGuire writes that the contemporary creation of a ‘nostalgic Elgar’ during the period 1920-1934 served two antithetical functions, firstly to assert the composer as a national symbol of the new compositional possibilities in the post-war environment, and secondly to emphasise his ‘increasing compositional irrelevance’, since the labels ‘modern’ and ‘modernist’ could no longer be ascribed to his work with any validity. Yet McGuire provides little argument in support of this statement. He attempts to explain the latter clause with the assertion, promulgated by contemporary commentator C. W. Orr, that Elgar ‘consistently refrained from the extravagances of modernism, the narrowness of “schools”, and the self-conscious poses of the “advanced set” in music’, in order to ‘write largely for the man in the street’,⁹⁹

⁹⁶Friedrich Schiller, ‘On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry’, *German aesthetic and literary criticism: Volume I*, ed. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: CUP, 1985); quoted in Heaney, ‘Eclogues: “In Extremis”’, 7.

⁹⁷Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 223; quoted in Gilbert, “‘Rats’ Alley””, 183.

⁹⁸Gilbert, “‘Rats’ Alley””, 183.

⁹⁹C. W. Orr, ‘Elgar and the Public’, *Musical Times* 72/1055 (1931), 17–18; quoted in McGuire, ‘Edward Elgar: “Modern” or “Modernist”?’, 23.

relying on the obvious tension between the essential elitism of modernism, and the 'lowbrow' status of the 'man in the street'. However, with the increased awareness of the fragility of human life and of the value of the individual, illuminated starkly by the extreme death tolls of the Great War, is there not something definitively modernist about writing 'for the man in the street'? It was, after all, the man on the street who brought about the condition of modernity to which artists were responding, and it was precisely the man on the street who had been to some degree excluded from the elitist, restricted nature of artistic production, dissemination and reception over the preceding two centuries.

A similar mantra characterises the work of Benjamin Britten, whose intention to write music that was both accessible to and comprehensible by ordinary people was well documented. Various authors describe Britten's grounding in his English heritage, and Hans Keller's emphatic eulogy adumbrates the composer's modernist compromise with the past.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Peter Maxwell Davies, heralded more often than most other twentieth-century British composers as a modernist because of his appreciation, and subsequent appropriation, of techniques from the European mid-century avant-garde, also demonstrates an allusive compromise with the past in his works from the 1960s, as Rupprecht writes: 'By the early 1960s, Davies was engaged with the fashioning of a musical self defined, mirror-like, in relation to images from a British music-historical past. Far from rejecting earlier British music, his music is suddenly composed [...] by writing over, re-animating and extending its earlier gestures.'¹⁰¹ This observation shapes part of the discussion of his *Sea Orpheus* in

¹⁰⁰Hans Keller, 'The Musical Character', in *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on his Works from a Group of Specialists* (London: Rockliff Publishing Corporation, 1952), 341.

¹⁰¹Rupprecht, "Something Slightly Indecent", 308.

Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Franklin comments on the importance of nostalgia as a coping mechanism in the interwar period, writing that the dismissal of Sibelius's symphonies by so-called 'high modernists' such as Theodor Adorno contrarily stresses their contemporary relevance: 'they became sites of musical expression and experience in which power and nostalgia, "heroic" engagement, escape, lamentation, or euphoric communal celebration could be figured in ways that were immediately decipherable in the concert hall or the newly available privacy of "home listening"'.¹⁰² If these were the emotions experienced by members of society in the interwar era, they must arguably have been motivated by the condition of modernity; since modernist art has been defined as a response to the condition of modernity, nostalgia is *ipso facto* identified as an important element of its surrounding critical discourse. Winter contends that 'the backward gaze of so many in this period reflected the universality of grief and mourning in Europe from 1914',¹⁰³ and with this in mind, Gilbert describes the consequent transmutation of the redemptive view of death at the basis of the historic pastoral elegy into 'more nihilistic, monstrous visions'.¹⁰⁴ McGuire writes of the post-WWI pastoral metaphor as a 'rhetorical double-edged sword',¹⁰⁵ retaining something of its pre-war definitive 'Englishness', while simultaneously signifying a new era far removed from anything recognisable to those who had survived the recent conflict. Gilbert confirms this observation, describing the 'new poetics of grief and death' that emerged following the Great War, and citing the conflict as 'as crucial a turning point in the history of both death and elegy as it is in the history of warfare.' The pastoral elegy, she

¹⁰²Franklin, 'Between the wars', 197.

¹⁰³Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 223; quoted in Gilbert, "'Rats' Alley'", 183.

¹⁰⁴Gilbert, "'Rats' Alley'", 183.

¹⁰⁵McGuire, 'Edward Elgar: "Modern" or "Modernist"?', 23.

writes, may be considered paradigmatic of English literary mourning traditions.¹⁰⁶ Alpers suggests that an understanding of pastoral poetics not only helps to inform our reading of pastoral literature, but may also be of use on a broader scale, because of the ‘unusual self-consciousness of pastoral writings’,¹⁰⁷ which might help us to engage with other genres, and, I would add, pastoralism in other art forms. He concludes with mention of a commonality between the creators of twentieth-century pastoralist art and those who study them, indicative of the continued relevance of the genre throughout history, not only after the First World War, but still today: ‘We may also recall the situation of Virgil’s herdsmen, as we look out on a world of bloodshed, inhumanity and ideological aggression that we can do little to affect but that [...] we must still speak our minds about.’¹⁰⁸ We might conclude, as Saylor suggests, that pastoral modernity was located in artists’ ability to modify the genre’s conventional signifiers so that they became once again relevant to contemporary culture. That the modern pastoral takes as its central tenet a new characterisation of death and its associated pathos is unsurprising, since ‘no event was more relevant to British culture in the early twentieth century than the First World War.’¹⁰⁹ There is a poignant irony in the fact that the *war to end all wars* was rather only the first in a series of devastatingly modern conflicts which would continue to shape not only British culture, but global society over the coming century and beyond. Jonathan Cross offers a particularly elegant oration on the centrality of nostalgia to twentieth-century modernism, employing the allegory of dance:

¹⁰⁶Gilbert, “‘Rats’ Alley”’, 179-82.

¹⁰⁷Alpers, “‘The Philoctetes Problem”’, 4.

¹⁰⁸Alpers, “‘The Philoctetes Problem”’, 17.

¹⁰⁹Saylor, “‘It’s not lambkins frisking at all””, 45.

Nostalgia through dance [is] a metaphor for the elsewhere or ‘elsewhen’ for which modernists yearn, from which they have become dislocated, and to which they can never return. It is a dance that speaks of the alienation of the late-modern subject. For some modernists – whom we might call avant-garde – that alienation takes the form of a complete and utter rejection of the past. But most modernists need to find ways of coming to terms with this alienation, an accommodation with the past within the present, as a way of being able to live. Modern progress from past to future comes to an end; time in itself seems to stand still.

Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is.

There is nothing moderate about this. It is at the very heart of a modernist sensibility.¹¹⁰

This presentation of an essentially Edenic view of modernism is at odds with the teleological stereotype of avant-gardism that is usually associated with modernist art. Cross’s conceptualization of the need for accommodation of ‘the past within the present’ in which ‘time in itself seems to stand still’ illustrates perfectly the immanent suitability of modernist artworks for interpretation under a *spatial* paradigm, in which issues of chronology, of antecedence and consequence, are disregarded, in order to assimilate common concerns within a single interpretative moment.

Britain to the side of (and behind) the Continent: The Interwar Years

Doctor concludes that the most enterprising description of British musical modernism prior to 1945 is that offered by Philip Gibbs in 1935, which she describes as ‘the paratactic notion of “two worlds living side by side”’:¹¹¹

The old-world England, hardly touched by the increasing rhythm of the speed mania which is called Progress, hardly affected by the trash of the mind, the jazzing up of life, the restlessness, the triviality, which goes by the name of the Modern Spirit; yet in this other world of bricks and mortar, of picture palaces, of factories and flats,

¹¹⁰Jonathan Cross, ‘British Musical Modernism and the Dance of Nostalgia,’ version given as the keynote address at *Musical Modernism in Britain*, RMA Study Day, Oxford University, 26 April 2008; the italic quotation is from T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton” (1935), the first poem of the *Four Quartets*; quoted in Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 112.

¹¹¹Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 112.

and electric trams and chain stores, there is something still very traditional in the crowds that pass and in the individuals which make up the crowds.¹¹²

Tradition did not endure completely, however, as Rosa Newmarch observed in 1927: ‘There arose an audience [...] one which craved for living forms, energetic movement, colour [...] It appeared that only gulps of what was then very modern orchestral music [...] could appease this awakening hunger for a vital, secular art.’¹¹³ The non- (and in many cases anti-) religious nature of such art may be seen as a reaction against a God who had allowed the incomprehensible devastation of the Great War to occur, manifested specifically in music as an opposition to the English *choral* (as opposed to orchestral) tradition of the preceding era. Vaughan Williams’s *Job: A Masque for Dancing*, will particularly be considered in this light in Chapter 4. Newmarch’s use of the word ‘vital’ connotes the primal, expressionistic associations often strongly associated with twentieth-century artistic modernism. Gilbert corroborates the loss of faith experienced by many in the aftermath of the conflict, describing the ‘bankruptcy’ of religion as a source of comfort. She attests that for individuals in this situation, only ‘an act of witnessing, of attesting to the anti-pastoral reality of the scenes of death and dying, can constitute a properly elegiac tribute to the slaughtered multitudes.’¹¹⁴

In the years between the two world wars, possibly as a reaction to the acknowledged multiplicity of the umbrella term’s constituents or to deny the artistic continuities between Romanticism and modernism, the distinction between what has become known as ‘high modernism’, and other forms of modernist art became

¹¹²Philip Gibbs, *England Speaks* (1935); quoted in Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 89.

¹¹³Rosa Newmarch, ‘The Proms’ [Introduction to 1927 Promenade Concert programmes], 10; same essay printed as ‘The Promenade Concerts’, *BBC Handbook 1928* (London: BBC, 1928), 101; quoted in Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 96.

¹¹⁴Gilbert, “‘Rats’ Alley”’, 188.

increasingly more pronounced. Sociologists such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer used the term ‘culture industry’ with critical derision to separate populist, and therefore definitely not-‘high modernist’ artistic products (which they saw as capitalist tools with which the general public were manipulated into passivity and subservience and thereby controlled) out from what they saw as an acceptable continuation of the Western art tradition.¹¹⁵ Franklin refers to this elitism as ‘the other great repression of the conventional narrative of musical modernism and the collapse of tonality: the whole sphere of popular culture.’¹¹⁶ This prejudice was not solely a feature of Continental cultural philosophy, however; as Stephen Arata contends, part of the British modernist philosophy in the years after the Great War was to ‘position modernism against popular culture.’¹¹⁷

One wonders where this ideological positioning left British composers during the interwar years. Byron Adams asserts that ‘after the war, Vaughan Williams found himself the figurehead of British musical modernism almost by default,’¹¹⁸ yet does not provide any justification for this suggestion. The composer’s post-war oeuvre certainly contrasts strikingly with his pre-war works, as Barone’s account of the Fourth Symphony illustrates.¹¹⁹ If we accept this postulation, we may come one step closer to defining a characteristic feature of British musical modernism, as opposed to that of continental Europe. Adams explains: ‘Vaughan Williams’ art never eschewed practicality. The composer was a passionate advocate of amateur music-making, and wrote music for choruses and orchestras populated with enthusiastic non-professionals.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997).

¹¹⁶ Franklin, ‘Between the wars’, 191.

¹¹⁷ Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 178; quoted in McGuire, ‘Edward Elgar: “Modern” or “Modernist”?’, 28.

¹¹⁸ Adams, ‘Foreword’, 5.

¹¹⁹ Barone, ‘Modernist Rifts in a Pastoral Landscape’.

An emphasis on the practical uses of art and technology is a distinguishing feature of British modernism.’¹²⁰ This testament further reinforces my suggestion of the importance of acknowledging the status of the ordinary individual in relation to British modernism both in the period after the First World War, and that following the Second World War. Like Elgar and later Britten, Vaughan Williams rejected elitism and ardently promoted the universality of music’s appeal and relevance to society in general. An additional example of the pragmatism of British modernism is found in the poetry of Edith Sitwell, particularly those poems written for a practical purpose, to provide a pretext for William Walton’s *Façade* (1924). Adams comments that Sitwell, exemplary of a peculiarly British strand of modernism, does not enter ‘into the dark recesses of the psyche, nor [does she] explore forbidden sexuality, nor deride religion. Rather Sitwell uses [the proto-modernist French poet] Rimbaud’s experimental techniques of juxtaposing images in order to create a modernist synthesis of pastoral tropes with Victorian reminiscences for the purposes of sly satire rather than savage mockery.’¹²¹

An established bias against British music and in favour of concurrent developments in continental Europe during the interwar period, and indeed, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, is a commonly acknowledged feature of scholarship on musical modernism. Doctor notes that British new music is perceived to have been of lesser importance than its continental counterpart, because it ‘did not “measure up” in terms of Continental musical modernisms,

¹²⁰Adams, ‘Foreword’, 5.

¹²¹Adams, ‘Foreword’, 2. For a thorough reconfiguration of Walton’s *Façade* in relation to a new model of British Musical Modernism, see the recent PhD thesis by Annika Forkert, *British Musical Modernism Defended Against its Devotees* Royal Holloway, University of London (2014), Chapter 6.

the musical modernisms that have since come to populate secondary textbooks and anthologies, the musical modernisms of the “academic canon”.¹²² Barone asserts that the ‘European modernist mainstream’ shared a definitive set of common principles, identified by Eugene Lunn as ‘aesthetic self-consciousness or self reference [...] the deployment of simultaneity, juxtaposition or montage techniques [...] the embedding of paradox, subversion and ambiguity [...] and] the dehumanisation and alienation of individuals and the banishment or pathologising of subjective gaze.’¹²³ Taking a broader view of modernisms in this period, Franklin contests that such a common aesthetic outlook prevailed at all, declaring that ‘from the beginning of the interwar period, the myth of an artistic modernism embracing common objectives is dispelled by any closer consideration of its protagonists’ circumstances, politics and affiliations.’¹²⁴ He suggests that the familiar view of modernism, such as it is promulgated by Lunn, is in fact the product of a ‘moral obligation’ to assert some kind of alternative to the retrospectively acknowledged narrative that ‘everything that happened during the interwar period pointed with [...] macabre logic towards the arrival of the National Socialists.’¹²⁵ Rupprecht asserts the continued accuracy of this view in the period following the Second World War, suggesting that ‘it would be wrong, though, simply to conflate the British musical and cultural scene, post-1945, with cultural environments elsewhere in Europe – there was no homogenous “European” musical scene during these decades, but instead a plurality of distinctive

¹²²Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 109.

¹²³Eugene Lunn, *Marxism & Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 34–38; quoted in Barone, ‘Modernist Rifts in a Pastoral Landscape’, 61.

¹²⁴Franklin, ‘Between the wars’, 189.

¹²⁵Franklin, ‘Between the wars’, 186.

national endeavours.’¹²⁶

In any case, scholarly consensus concedes that during the interwar period, modernism in Britain had a definitively different character to that of mainland Europe. We might assert a difference of tense within the perspective of modernist art created in Britain and that hailing from the continent, as Adams implies through a comparison of Edith Sitwell and Arthur Rimbaud: ‘Rimbaud aspired to be a “seer”, but Sitwell was less of a seer than an acute and sensitive observer of the life around her.’¹²⁷ Barone comments that ‘English modernism lacked any presumption of the ideological and aesthetic coherence of the European modernist mainstream.’¹²⁸ McGuire suggests that the lack of academic attention historically given to British interwar modernism stems in part from unhelpful contemporary commentary from members of the upper echelons of British society such as Osbert Sitwell: ‘Sitwell’s opinions, shared by many of the post-war avant-garde and echoed since illumine a series of tropes that have ossified into stereotypes reducing the complexity of a multi-faceted period surrounding the interwar consolidation of British modernism.’¹²⁹ While recognising firstly the existence of artistic modernism in Britain during this period, and secondly its individual character, certain scholars are careful to emphasise what they perceive as the catalytic role of European aesthetics in the development of the phenomenon. Adams refers to a ‘venerable tradition of British artists who expropriated continental models for their own purposes’, and illustrates this statement with the example of Ralph Vaughan Williams, whose musical language was transformed by study with Maurice Ravel in Paris in 1907: ‘the absorption of the harmonic resources of

¹²⁶Rupprecht, ‘“Something Slightly Indecent”’, 282.

¹²⁷Adams, ‘Foreword’, 2-3.

¹²⁸Barone, ‘Modernist Rifts in a Pastoral Landscape’, 61.

¹²⁹McGuire, ‘Edward Elgar: “Modern” or “Modernist”?’, 10.

contemporary French music enabled him to integrate the pastoral (represented by English folksong) with the historical (symbolised by Tudor polyphony) into an idiom at once modern and inimitable.¹³⁰

The testimony of Peter Maxwell Davies in the era following the Second World War brings this perspective more sharply into focus: ‘We must study Continental thought, understand it, absorb its principles, criticise them constructively, and in light of the experience of the music of the past, take the next step forward.’¹³¹ Maxwell Davies demonstrates the more confident, adventurous, self-aware face of British musical modernism at this time; suggesting that rather than offering a tangential, introspective outlook, British modernism was now ready, and willing, to position itself at the forefront of artistic development and innovation, challenging the established superiority of its European peers. The superlative status of central European music was so ingrained in contemporary cultural consciousness that even British critics derogatorily acknowledged the strong Teutonic influence on the works of Elgar – as McGuire testifies: ‘stressing Elgar’s debt to Austro-German musical tradition was often a discreet way of noting the supposed derivative nature of British music’¹³² – rather than acknowledging his evident debt to post-Wagnerian discourse as a positive indication of his modernism. Partly as a reactionary response to the overt patriotism and sense of national superiority at the heart of the fascist agenda, overt international collaboration became a feature of Western European music in the period following the Second World War. Rupprecht cites the common aim of Darmstadt and political alliances such as the Council of Europe as ‘the re-establishment of international

¹³⁰Adams, ‘Foreword’, 3.

¹³¹Peter Maxwell Davies speaking on BBC Radio’s *Third Programme* (1959); quoted in Rupprecht, ‘“Something Slightly Indecent”’, 301.

¹³²McGuire, ‘Edward Elgar: “Modern” or “Modernist”?’, 24.

relations and the tempering of destructive nationalist forces after six years of war.’¹³³ Cultural critic Homi K. Bhabha’s pedagogical discourse becomes relevant here, as we note the importance and workable co-existence of established national heritage (coming from the past), and individual, autonomous self-identification (in the present, with potential for the future): ‘The nation’s people must be thought in double time [...] The people are the historical “objects” of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*; the people are also the “subjects” of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity.’¹³⁴

Nationalism and Identity: To the Mid-Century, and Beyond...

Questions of nationalism, and national identity, pervade both contemporary and more recent discourse surrounding modernism in British art during the twentieth century. Saylor comments on the unique nature of British musical modernism, describing such idiomatic works as ‘both highly idiosyncratic and distinct from those of conventionally “modernist” Continental musicians.’ He locates the impetus for this characterisation in the strongly nationalist outlook so often attributed to British cultural aesthetics, citing as directional factors ‘the pervasive conservatism of English musical culture throughout much of the nineteenth century, coupled with widely promoted exhortations from certain academic, artistic and journalistic factions

¹³³Rupprecht, ‘“Something Slightly Indecent”’, 283.

¹³⁴Homi K. Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation’, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 145 (original emphasis); quoted in Rupprecht, ‘“Something Slightly Indecent”’, 281 and 316.

regarding the need for British composers to establish a “national” school of music.¹³⁵ Franklin names Vaughan Williams as one such composer, who responded to these pressures by constructing ‘a musical persona in which modern and traditional elements were joined, in a multifaceted discourse, with the politics of nationalism.’¹³⁶ Over the course of the interwar period, those who saw themselves as high modernists increasingly advocated the rejection, or rather replacement, of nationalism with abstraction and socio-political autonomy; paradoxically this perceived ‘ideological purity’ was highly socially contingent, becoming in the years immediately following the Second World War a statement of Western intellectual superiority over the uncivilized Soviet bloc. Rupprecht concludes his discussion of the British response to European avant-gardism in the 1950s with the emphatic assertion that ‘the story of the post-war avant-garde in Britain is itself intimately bound-up with music’s creation and recreation of sounding myths of national identity.’¹³⁷

Divergences of opinion over avant-garde musical language and its relation to modernism in Britain continued to be voiced over the coming decades, with Britten describing in 1969 his own ‘entirely personal’ compositional techniques as being ‘founded on a time when the language was not so broken as it is now.’ Furthermore, he states, ‘seeking after a new language has become more important than saying what you mean.’¹³⁸ This last part of Britten’s polemic posits the composer’s acknowledgement of the social nature of art, suggesting that music’s truer purpose should be to communicate something to its audience, rather than to strive for the heights of

¹³⁵Saylor, “‘It’s not lambkins frisking at all’”, 41.

¹³⁶Franklin, ‘Between the wars’, 194.

¹³⁷Rupprecht, “‘Something Slightly Indecent’”, 313.

¹³⁸Benjamin Britten, in an interview with Donald Mitchell published as ‘Mapreading’ in *The Britten Companion* (Faber & Faber: London, 1984), 93-96.

abstraction, distancing oneself as far from comprehension as possible. Initial responses from the British public to Peter Maxwell Davies's *Five Pieces for Piano* (Op. 2) suggest that many listeners identified with Britten's ideas, with a by now familiar objection to the serialist techniques used in the work's creation voicing itself as a distaste for artificial construction simply for its own sake.¹³⁹ Indeed, Rupprecht notes that twelve-tone methods were not only viewed as somehow 'indecent' by British musicians, but also that those who looked upon European methods unfavourably availed themselves of them in a manner resembling a kind of 'amateur dabbling [...] as if to draw attention by ironic display to [...] their] fundamentally dubious nature.'¹⁴⁰ Rupprecht observes a dramatic change in attitude to domestic traditions on the part of the group of composers contemporary with Peter Maxwell Davies around 1960, when 'historical and intertextual references to a national tradition' began to be incorporated actively into assertively modernist British music. He remarks on the degree of change in aesthetic represented by this technique, describing the potential for its aesthetics to have been problematic only a few years previously to a 'dogmatic European avant-garde driven by myths of a "zero-hour" cultural re-birth' following the Second World War.¹⁴¹

The Current Historiographical Context

Franklin encapsulates the new directions taken in recent scholarship on British musical modernism in the last century, observing that 'postmodern historiography encourages us to challenge and re-think existing narratives of twentieth-century

¹³⁹Rupprecht, "Something Slightly Indecent", 295.

¹⁴⁰Rupprecht, "Something Slightly Indecent", 277.

¹⁴¹Rupprecht, "Something Slightly Indecent", 313.

music history.¹⁴² Rupprecht supports such efforts, writing that ‘musical modernism has itself frequently been the subject of damaging historiographic stereotypes. Images of post-war modernist music as radically autonomous, free of ideological traces and stylistically homogenous have come to seem increasingly partial, if not plain inaccurate.’¹⁴³ Doctor extends the observation of such misconceptions further back in time: ‘the exclusion of British music from prevailing conceptions of interwar modernism is a presumption that currently cries out for reassessment.’¹⁴⁴ I hope to offer such a re-conception through this thesis, following the efforts of the more recent ‘Britmod’ scholars mentioned during this chapter, and those who have successfully re-evaluated and nuanced the concept of musical modernism in other cultural contexts.¹⁴⁵ Having acknowledged the plurality of modernist aesthetics during the twentieth century, I will consider the works in question against Doctor’s ‘conception of coexisting streams of repertoire that may have taken different paths with different people in different places.’¹⁴⁶ In response to negative reception of his *War Requiem* in Vienna, Britten wrote ‘new works can be misunderstood not only for how they say something, but for what they say’;¹⁴⁷ while acknowledging the implausibility of attempting to identify a composer’s own intentions at the naissance of a musical

¹⁴²Franklin, ‘Between the wars’, 187.

¹⁴³Rupprecht, ‘“Something Slightly Indecent”’, 282.

¹⁴⁴Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 99.

¹⁴⁵See, for example, the reappraisal of musical modernism in Scandinavian music in such works as Daniel M. Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010); James Hepokoski, *Sibelius: Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993); Tomi Mäkelä, ‘The Wings of a Butterfly: Sibelius and the Problems of Musical Modernity’, *Jean Sibelius and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Max Paddison, ‘Art and the Ideology of Nature: Sibelius, Hamsun, Adorno’, *Jean Sibelius and His World*; Leon Botstein, ‘Old Masters: Jean Sibelius and Richard Strauss in the Twentieth Century’, *Jean Sibelius and His World*.

¹⁴⁶Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 112.

¹⁴⁷Benjamin Britten, quoted in Mervyn Cooke, *Cambridge Music Handbook: Britten, War Requiem* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 83.

work, I hope to look beyond superficial appearances and established scholarly conclusions to develop multiple interpretive perspectives on the works concerned. I will endeavour to offer an alternative hypothesis not on what modernism is, but rather what it might have been, in a peculiarly British, twentieth-century context.

Outline of the Thesis

The spatial interrogation of the mediating function of mythology in British art music presented in this thesis is developed through two strands, both deploying a common methodological framework which is elaborated in Chapter 1, ‘Spatial Form: From Literature to Music’. The first strand (Part II) investigates the role of mythology in twentieth-century British opera through an in-depth spatial examination of Michael Tippett’s *King Priam*, divided between two constituent chapters. Chapter 2, ‘*King Priam*: Questions of Form and Structure’, offers a discussion of the formal design and structural shape of Tippett’s opera, detailing its definition in relation to a rupturing of plot from story within the context of the narrative. Tippett’s compositional techniques in this regard are illuminated and contextualized by paratextual comparison with Hyginus’ *Fabulae*, Homer’s *Iliad*, the corpus of fifth-century Athenian tragic drama, and musical works by Wagner, Britten, and Stravinsky. Chapter 3, ‘Critical Spatial Readings of Mediation’, follows to conclude the case study, presenting a thorough and challenging interrogation of *King Priam*’s hermeneutic potential, particularly with regard to the work’s overarching theme of conflict and the association of that concept with mediation of binaries. This is prepared with a discussion of Tippett’s philosophical and psychoanalytical preoccupations, and an applied consideration of

the critical role of the engaged reader in creating meaning. In particular, the central mediating function of the Athenian *choros*, mirrored in this opera, is discussed in detail.

The second strand (Part III) demonstrates the varied and wide-ranging insights to be gained from an application of the thesis's spatial methodological framework to orchestral music which, while engaging clearly with drama and myth, does so with no sung element. Chapter 4, '*Job: A Masque for Dancing* – Mediating Life and Faith', sets out an argument for the establishment of the Everyman as the subject of modernist British artistic expression, considering the potential identification of the work as a modernist British pastoral. Vaughan Williams's music for Geoffrey Keynes's ballet scenario based on the biblical *Book of Job*, translated through the twenty-one engraved plates of William Blake's *Illustrations to the Book of Job*, is subjected to detailed spatial form analysis in which these three versions of the Job myth are treated variously as text and paratext(s), since under the spatial conceptual framework none of them is to be considered the primary, or authoritative, version. Chapter 5, '*Sea Orpheus: Reflections on Global Existence in the Twenty-first Century*', examines the concept of transformation in Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's *New Brandenburg* concerto, composed in 2009, subjecting the thesis's spatial methodology to the challenges presented by a work with no accompanying dramatic or choreographed stage action, and no sung text. The discussion offered here demonstrates the broad applicability of the interpretative framework, illustrating meta-theoretical ideas of transformation, and presenting the work as a twenty-first century symphonic poem which might evocatively and compellingly be read as an allegory for the threat posed to the environment by global warming. Finally, Part IV contains the Epilogue, 'Final Reflections on Spatial Mediation', which summarizes the conclusions reached in each

part of the thesis, and develops a broader overarching peroration to the thesis's discussion and application of spatial form analysis with regard to musical works.

Chapter 1

Spatial Form: From Literature to Music

In the rather limited literature that treats the relationship between myth and music there are several significant lacunae, particularly in a twentieth- and twenty-first-century context. After problematizing the scant existing discourse on music and myth, this chapter presents a detailed overview of the methodological approach proposed and applied in this thesis, locating its roots in the spatial form theory of modernist literary critic Joseph Frank in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, and illustrating the ease with which we are able to transfer its foundational principles from the sphere of the literary arts and onto music (taking Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* as an extremely familiar mythic exemplar to which the theory might be applied in its first broad brush strokes). Along the way, this will demonstrate how the spatial method can help to work round some of the limitations of current research.

1.1 Extant Scholarship on Myth and Music

In contrast to the nuanced discussion of the function of myth in modernist literature, there is a dearth of extant scholarship on the presence of myth in musical works, particularly the repertory explored in the present study. A selection of literature, not available in English translation, focuses on dramatic and programmatic works based on familiar stories from ancient, predominantly Greek, mythology; however, such works rarely, if ever, mention appropriations by British composers, and their discussion is largely limited to matters of textual adaptation in libretti and/or

programmatic description. Various smaller-scale publications mention myth as a compositional influence, but in the twentieth century this seems to be with regard only to those composers whose music is deemed to stand in some sort of alignment to contemporary modernist aesthetics.¹ Three individual monographs investigating the relationship between myth and music must be acknowledged here, however, for their relevant, if ultimately limited, insights.

Eero Tarasti's *Myth and Music*² focuses mostly on opera, music drama, and symphonic works with a strong underlying dramatic narrative. His analysis is formulated around conventional mythological tropes taken from semiotic analyses of mythic content in literature, and is applied principally to three European composers: Wagner, Stravinsky and Sibelius. François-Bernard Mâche's *Myth, Music and Nature*³, provides a contemporary composer's perspective on Ancient Greek myth as a point of inspiration for musical creativity. His work deals with examples from a variety of styles and composers, with Britain again standing as a notable exception.

Victoria Adamenko's *Neo-mythologism in Music*⁴ appears at first glance to address many of these lacunae; indeed, the author identifies the evident potential for fruitful research into the relationship between myth and music, and describes the shortcomings of the limited extant scholarship. She condemns the preoccupation of existing literature with purely dramatic works, and indeed, her study treats a wide range of genres, from operas to symphonies, songs to solo piano works, string

¹ Cf. for example, Richard Taruskin, 'Stravinsky and Us', *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), particularly 262-265.

² Eero Tarasti, *Myth and Music. A Semiotic Approach to the Aesthetics of Myth in Music, especially that of Wagner, Sibelius, and Stravinsky* (New York: Mouton, 1979).

³ François-Bernard Mâche, *Music, Myth and Nature*, trans. Susan Delaney (Paris and Philadelphia: Harwood, 1992).

⁴ Victoria Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music: From Scriabin and Schoenberg to Schnittke and Crumb* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2007).

quartets to requiems, and ballets to large-scale instrumental works. However, she fails to address one of the major limitations highlighted in her survey of extant scholarship: the lack of a study which covers within its remit the entire twentieth-century. The subtitle of the book ‘From Scriabin and Schoenberg to Schnittke and Crumb’ indicates the body of central European, Russian and American composition from which her examples will be drawn. While her chosen repertoire covers a wide span across the majority of the twentieth century, its geographic range is somewhat limited, and thus the work simply adds to the body of musicological scholarship which venerates the music of so-called avant-garde or experimental composers who vehemently rejected tonality, without attempting to challenge this established historiographical value system. Adamenko’s subscription to the atonal modernist paradigm is indicated at various moments in the book, such as in her statement that ‘the void created by the disappearance of tonality was inevitably filled with those prime elementary structuring methods first used in myths’,⁵ and later that ‘composers who borrow material from earlier periods emphasized the abyss between the era of tonality or modality, on the one hand, and the present time, on the other’;⁶ this latter statement is extremely problematic, as the discussion of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies’s neo-classical work *Sea Orpheus* in Chapter 5 of this thesis will demonstrate. While such a narrowly defined repertorial focus is certainly legitimate, given the scholarly tradition within which this work situates itself, it does not constitute treatment of the ‘century as a whole’, since there is not even a laconic acknowledgement of this constriction of focus, and a rationale for so doing.

⁵Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music*, xii.

⁶Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music*, 88.

Adamenko states in the foreword that she is attempting to expand the ‘current empirical and narrow paradigms’ employed by musicologists to discuss the relationship between myth and music in broader philosophical terms, in service of the following research questions: ‘How do changes in aesthetics, historical circumstances, and perceptions influence the capacity of music to support and project our mythologizing notions and world views? How does the mythological reveal itself within modernist and postmodernist aesthetics? What are the historical-cultural decoding channels in our present-day possession that allow audiences, performers, critics, and researchers to perceive symbolic meaning in music?’⁷ Adamenko’s first question here, combined with her explicit statement of twentieth-century composers’ intentional fabrication of ‘an idiosyncratic myth about the world’⁸ reveals an underlying premise of her approach from which the present study seeks to distance itself: namely, the idea of deliberate compositional intent. Various references throughout the book to a conscious and deliberate creation of myth or ritual demonstrate a flaw in her interpretive perspective, since it is misleading, even dangerous, to speculate as to an artist’s ‘true’ intentions.⁹ Where Adamenko seeks to establish the compositional aim behind the works she analyses, the present study focuses rather on the range of potential interpretations of the works in question. Her final two research questions, however, provide useful guiding premises for the present study.

It is clear from Adamenko’s work, particularly her partial adoption of Lévi-Strauss’s ethnographic methodology, that her definition of myth is somewhat specialised, delineated within a primordial, ritualistic frame. This is a common

⁷Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music*, xi.

⁸Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music*, xii.

⁹Richard Taruskin provides testimony to this effect, in *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford: OUP, 1995).

feature of myth scholarship, and is perhaps unsurprising, given the obvious and rational associations of myth with ancestral societies, ancient traditions, and Other – usually definitively less technologically advanced – cultures. Adamenko posits a rather grandiose role for twentieth-century composers (citing Schoenberg as the epitomic example) writing, ‘in modern society, where art assumes some of the functions of archaic ritual, the composer may take over the shaman’s tasks of healing, reunification and restoring order out of chaos.’¹⁰ While I fully acknowledge art’s potential for such *katharsis*, I take issue with the characterisation of the composer as witch-doctor, and the implied general applicability and effectiveness of his treatments. The conceptualisation of mythic meaning as discourse, representing the personal engagement of the reader with the mythological content within an interpretative space where the subjectivity of the Self and of the Other are mutually and variously mediated, is inherently individual. Each reader’s response to the hermeneutic potential contained within a mythological artwork is necessarily and inescapably unique, and requires that the reader contributes something of his/herself to the interpretative act. This type of engagement is incompatible with an image of the composer as agent of healing and restoration for a mass, non-specific, passive audience. Adamenko adopts the term ‘neo-mythologism’ to refer to ‘newly-constructed, resurrected, desirable, vital – that is, culturally-inspiring – myths’, as opposed to ‘those myths in need of de-mythification’ (frustratingly, the author gives no indication of what that might entail).¹¹ The present study stands in clear contradistinction in this respect, rejecting the underlying air – which carries a whiff of superiority – of Adamenko’s focus on primitive ritualism and the definitive

¹⁰Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music*, 170.

¹¹Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music*, 2.

cultural specificity of the subjective interaction with myth it implies. Similarly it is not concerned with any great claims of transcendence of cultural boundaries, or communication in some sort of utopian universal language, in opposition to Adamenko's dictum that 'both neo-mythologism and neo-ritualism of the twentieth century clearly provide foundations for transcending cultural borders.'¹² Furthermore, I am troubled by the value judgment process inherent in the assignment of the 'neo' prefix in Adamenko's methodology.

Neo-mythologism in Music does however provide some helpful triangulation points of which I will make use. First, Adamenko's observation of the 'basic structural ideas on which mythic thought has traditionally relied, such as opposition, symmetry, variability, and repetition', provides external – albeit unwitting – confirmation of the suitability of spatial form analysis for artworks based on mythology. Its further applicability to music is emphasized by the assertion that 'these structural ideas have always played important roles in the construction of musical forms.'¹³ Adamenko acknowledges the value of combining diachronic and synchronic perspectives, but in her work this takes place on a macro level, as she considers 'the dialogue of music and mythic, both diachronically, as a trend unfolding in history, and synchronically, as a trans-historical hermeneutic construct.'¹⁴ By focussing at such a broad level, on instances of 'neo-mythological tendencies' at various points during the twentieth-century, and on 'ideas and works by different composers [...] in one context',¹⁵ Adamenko limits herself to a slightly short-sighted overview of what she fails to apprehend as the spatial paradigm in which subjectivity, as expressed through

¹²Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music*, xv.

¹³Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music*, xii.

¹⁴Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music*, xii.

¹⁵Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music*, xiii.

the mythic and the musical, is open to mediation.

It is this spatial paradigm which is crucial to the methodology developed and explicated in the remainder of this chapter, and applied to the works under scrutiny in Parts II and III of this thesis. The following outline of the analytical framework deployed in the present study describes its genesis in modernist literary criticism, locating its immanence in artworks with a foundation in ancient mythology and thus asserting its particular appositeness to the task at hand. It is hoped that over the course of this chapter, and the subsequent application of the methodology in the case study chapters, the capacity for a definitively *spatial* model to overcome the lacunae and problematic issues in current scholarship pertaining to myth and music, especially within twentieth- and twenty-first-century British contexts, will become increasingly clear.

1.2 Reading Myth: The Dialectics of Time and Space

As we now move on to a discussion of how we are to understand myths and mythic artworks, we must first acknowledge the essential *process* at work as we read, interpret, re-read and re-interpret something which evades direct linguistic expression. In order to engage in this process, it is helpful to examine myth as a series of narrative events. Narrative is a function of both myth and art, and our engagement with it facilitates the translation of the mythic into an art form with which we may more easily interact. Fundamentally, we must recognize the fundamental tension which lies at the heart of mythic narrative and thus of my methodological approach to musical works based on mythology. Simply put, this is the ever-oscillating dialectic between time and space. Joseph Frank writes:

It is obvious that the closer the structure of a narrative conforms to causal-chronological sequence, the closer it corresponds to the linear-temporal order of language. Equally obvious, however, is that such correspondence is contrary to the nature of narrative as an art form. Indeed, all through the history of the novel a tension has existed between the linear-temporal nature of its medium (language) and the spatial elements required by its nature as a work of art. Most of what is [*sic*] known as the ‘formal conventions’ of the novel are an implicit agreement between writer and reader not to pay attention to this disjunction and to overlook the extent to which it exists.¹⁶

Frank’s reference to the novel here calls to mind Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the novel,¹⁷ particularly regarding the genre’s unique facilitation of self-reflection, and even self-redefinition in the reader. Bakhtin contrasts the novel with the epic, describing the latter as a ‘high-distance’ genre, isolated and fixed in form and content in a distant past, standing, rather like the pre-war nostalgic pastoral, as an idealized, utopian precedent that can only be sought after, and never recreated, while the former stands as testament to the possibilities of the present and the future, engaging with its contemporary context and offering the reader the opportunity to interrogate and reform his/her own subjectivity. Interestingly, Bakhtin asserts the power of the novel to ‘novelize’ other genres, transferring its characteristic imperative for reader engagement and transformative experiential qualities to other literary forms. Frank’s theory suggests that this ‘novelizing’ ability stems from the genre’s spatial characteristics (which are present, to varying degrees, in all artworks, but particularly so in modernist, mythological pieces as we will come to see), rather than the ‘linear-temporal’ or ‘linguistic’ terms of its presentation to the reader; this is why other works in other genres might appear ‘novelized’ – the latent potential is already there, ready to be fulfilled through *spatial* engagement.

¹⁶Joseph Frank, ‘Spatial Form in Modern Literature: Part I’, 235.

¹⁷*Cf.* Mikhail M. Bakhtin, ‘Epic and Novel: Towards a Methodology for the Study of the Novel’, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

It is the dimension of space which inheres in myth that offers what I perceive to be a fascinating and illuminating perspective on the works of twentieth- and twenty-first-century British music treated in this thesis. Frank, following Benveniste, further elucidates two forms of narrative style which I argue here may be mapped onto opera with ease, and also onto instrumental music founded on mythical material:

[We can distinguish] between *récit* and *discours* in terms of whether the presence of a locutor is grammatically indicated. *Récit* tends to eliminate any such reference, whether explicit or implied; *discours* brings the personal source of utterance to the foreground, or at least does not try to conceal such a presence. *Récit* is the pure form of objective narration; *discours* the pure form of subjective narration; neither, however, ever is found in a pure state, and they “contaminate” each other all through the history of narrative [...] *Récit* aims so far as possible at being the pure form of causal-chronological sequence; but it is constantly being interfered with by *discours*, which calls attention away from the flow of events to the narrator and the process of narration. Just as description tends to spatialize narration, so *discours* inevitably exercises a discreet spatializing effect, on the micro-narrative level, by its constant interruption of the rhythm of pure chronicity. This explains why an increase of interest in man’s subjective and emotional life, when translated into terms of literary form, automatically seems to lead to an increase in the spatialization of narrative.¹⁸

In order to explicate the tension between space and time in mythic narratives, it is useful to delineate further their opposition in specific terms. All narrative is multi-dimensional, with two main perceptual aspects: synchronic and diachronic. Jeffrey Smitten and Ann Daghistany define these terms as follows: ‘The latter [diachronic] is the forward progression of narrative, linear and sequential; the former [synchronic] is the context in which a given event in the [narrative] is perceived. All [narratives] have both synchronic and diachronic aspects, but the relations between them shift with different types of narratives.’¹⁹ Mythic narratives, in particular, direct and shape our interpretation of their underlying content by focusing the reader’s

¹⁸Frank, ‘Spatial Form in Modern Literature: Part I’, 239-40.

¹⁹Jeffrey R. Smitten and Ann Daghistany, ‘Introduction’, *Spatial Form in Narrative*, 26.

attention synchronically, highlighting aspects to which we must react in some way by positioning them, ‘plotting’ them, in an unfamiliar format. An obvious, but by no means delimiting, example of this technique exists in the narrative device of prophecy, plotting the (usually tragic) conclusion of a narrative at its start through explicit prescience. By drawing our attention to the vertical positioning of individual narrative events, we become aware of the inherent gap between the signifier and its unstated signified. Eric Rabkin describes this process, concluding that the end result always demands simultaneous perception from both the synchronic and diachronic perspectives: ‘With the interweaving of narration, dialogue and description a narrative not only defamiliarizes what it reports but guides the reader’s consciousness through rhythms of correspondence between reading time and actual time. As long as we do not stay *entirely* in one mode – and we never do – these rhythms adjust the movement of our consciousness so that unconsciously at least we more or less approach synchronicity, depending on the particular techniques, but we never achieve it.’²⁰

Ideas of space, in contradistinction to time, are characteristic of twentieth-century Modernist art. Paul de Man emphasizes the crucial spatial dimension of Modernist art, allied with its concern for self-identification and mythicity: ‘In describing literature, from the standpoint of the concept of modernity, as the steady fluctuation of an entity away from and toward its own mode of being, we have constantly stressed that this movement does not take place as an actual sequence in time; to represent it as such is merely a metaphor making a sequence out of what occurs in fact as a synchronic juxtaposition.’²¹ Relevant here too is the

²⁰Eric Rabkin, ‘Spatial Form and Plot’, 81.

²¹Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 163.

concept of parataxis (connoting ‘a common aesthetic strategy in modernist writing and art, developed to disrupt and fragment conventional sequencing, causality and perspective’²²) identified in the previous chapter as a fundamental component of British musical modernism, and additionally advocated by Rabkin as employing ‘particular spatializing techniques [which] use the necessary dialectic between the synchronic and diachronic aspects of reading to retrieve a coherent value system for a reader who may well feel himself to be in an incoherent world.’²³

The reading process may be divided into three constituent stages: first, we must understand the myriad relationships between the various internal parts of the work – that is, we must identify and comprehend deviations of plot from story. Ricardo Gullón describes this process, writing that ‘verbal space acquires consistency as the stylistic rendering of the text becomes apparent: reiteration, allusion, parallelism and contrast relate some parts of the narration to others, and the construction imposes itself on the reader through the action constituted by the reading.’²⁴ We might also draw on Gérard Genette’s theories of narratology here, to help us identify syntactical elements of narrative construction such as anachrony, variations of frequency, and changes in voice and mode, particularly of focalization.²⁵ Secondly, then, we can understand the work’s unity and its significance as a whole; and finally, we can locate the work within its external context – ‘once such relationships and their various significances have been established and the entity has been defined as a system, the step that completes the Structuralist process is that whereby the text

²²Stanford Friedman, ‘Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern / Modernity / Modernism’; quoted in Doctor, ‘The Parataxis of British Musical Modernism’, 91.

²³Rabkin, ‘Spatial Form and Plot’, 99.

²⁴Ricardo Gullón, ‘On Space in the Novel’, trans. René de Costa *Critical Inquiry* 2 (1975), 12.

²⁵*Cf.* Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

and its latent consciousness is related to its extraliterary context.’²⁶ Each stage of the process is necessarily spatial, synchronic rather than diachronic, and while they fit together into an ordered teleological process, at the final stage we are able to read the work’s meaning simultaneously on three levels, allowing the relations between them to become apparent. In fact, I would argue that we might just as productively move freely between the three levels of analysis, adopting a meta-spatial approach to the theory itself, and it is in this manner that the works under scrutiny in this thesis will be interrogated (see section 1.7).

When we then look at the work again, we do not focus on just one of these levels, or perspectives, but rather on a combination of them all: Although ‘we may tentatively accept the principle that, in the direct experience of fiction, continuity is the centre of our attention; our later memory, or what I call the possession of it, tends to become discontinuous. Our attention shifts from the sequence of incidents to another focus: a sense of what the work of fiction was all *about* [... T]he incidents themselves tend to remain [...] discontinuous, detached from one another and regrouped in a new way.’²⁷ This idea of multiple interpretative interactions with the text is particularly relevant in the interpretation of modernist mythological narratives, as Foust asserts: ‘Modern literature cannot be read, but only re-read.’²⁸ Roman Ingarden, too, sees ‘the work as a schematic construct to which its many cases of individual concretization have to be opposed. These concretizations are the result of each individual reading. The work is thus intersubjectively accessible and at the same time reproducible. These

²⁶Foust, ‘The Aporia of Recent Criticism and the Contemporary Significance of Spatial Form’, 197.

²⁷Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963), 23.

²⁸Foust, ‘The Aporia of Recent Criticism and the Contemporary Significance of Spatial Form’, 184. Note here that the process of re-reading refers to multiple engagements with the text at hand, rather than suggesting that this text is itself a re-reading of an earlier, originary, model.

qualities relate it to the reading community, which means that the work allows itself to be surveyed from many individual angles: what remains in the mind is always a condensed *Gestalt* rather than the book or a complete part of the book that has been perused.’²⁹

1.3 Interpreting Myth

1.3.1 Theoretical Prelude

Having already established that interpretation is the fundamental question at the centre of this study, it must now be acknowledged that complex deconstruction from multiple perspectives is required in order fully to tackle it. Gould asserts the unquantifiable nature of interpretation in terms parallel to the synchronous spatial identity of plot: ‘At best, all we can declare about the experience of interpretation is that we occupy a potential (and not an ideal) space in the world of language.’³⁰ At the end of the interpretative quest lies an encounter with meaning, but it is only through the process of interpretation that this meaning is constituted, and comes into being.³¹ Gould writes that ‘myths [...] necessarily refer to some essential meaning which is absent until it appears as a function of interpretation.’³² Following Claude Lévi-Strauss, he describes myths as ““constraining structures of the mind” [which] perceive relationships between self and an outer reality, yet these relationships are

²⁹Ivo Vidan, ‘Time Sequence in Spatial Fiction’, *Spatial Form in Narrative*, 134.

³⁰Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 63.

³¹I use the term ‘quest’ here to emphasize the crucial role of the reader (the hero/heroine who pursues the quest) and his/her commitment to the task at hand. The term carries with it connotations (which are here very unhelpful) of a journey to find a pre-determined, specific object or outcome, and so we might traditionally conceptualize it in predominantly linear, teleological terms, giving it the potential to feel disarmingly circular. This particular quest is therefore best thought of spatially, as an interactive experience which the reader undertakes with the text, and in which meaning is at once sought, created, and interpreted in the same moment.

³²Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 6.

largely unknown to the speaker until he becomes conscious of them in language [...] myths [are] only available to us as metalanguage. A myth is never the thing itself, but is always *about* something (idea or fact). It is an attempt to be accurate about a significant absence from discourse. It is appropriative of meaning, but at the same time a generative system, reusable yet tantalizing to us in our search for its relationship to events in the real world.’³³ It follows, therefore, that this meaning may take any number of forms, and that these forms may be in a constant state of flux as their mythological construction is continually re-interpreted, as Sienkewicz writes: ‘all myth ravel and unravels in a continuously changing tapestry of meaning.’³⁴ Importantly, in addition, the meaning identified by any individual reader will necessarily be in some sense unique, as Smitten and Daghistany confirm: ‘Aesthetic form and a perceiving mind mutually implicate one another.’³⁵

In the context of meaning, then, myth appears to be a very fluid, chameleon-like concept. Indeed, it might more appropriately be termed a type of discourse, rather than a discrete concept in itself. This discourse relies upon the personal engagement of the reader, who in the act of reading imbues objective narrative events with subjective significance, effecting a transactional dialogue between interior and exterior, Self and Other. The creation of this dialectical relationship in turn opens up an area of commonality, a mutually accessible and malleable space in which meaning is both created and interpreted. It is specifically by locating the mediation of Self and Other within, or in opposition to, demonstrably *spatial* boundaries, that they become mutually assimilable: ‘The act of interpretation is a discovery of the way

³³Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 99.

³⁴Sienkewicz, *Theories of Myth: An Annotated Bibliography*, 12.

³⁵Smitten and Daghistany, ‘Introduction’, 17.

the historical contingency of self and other actually allows each to be in some way related and even transformed in the effort of understanding.’³⁶ As Gould summarises: ‘The nature of myth and archetype, since both are revealed as discourse, is surely dependent on the process of interpretation as an endless interchange of the inside and the outside which is in turn dependent on language as capable of creating only a potential, self-duplicating space for the essential to occupy. The archetype is not monistic or a universal sign, but a significance *shared* by subject and object because of language [...] So [myth] is always a mediation and a metaphorical event and never an absolute.’³⁷ In *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Wotan is figured variously as King, God, Father, Husband, Lover, Brother-in-law, Master, Negotiator, and anonymous agent (The Wanderer); individual readers will identify to differing extents with each of these aspects of his characterization, shaping their interpretation of the mythological and musical negotiation between these roles presented in the tetralogy. A similar discussion will emerge in relation to Tippett’s configuration of Priam in Chapters 2 and 3.

With regard to social meaning, we must consider the particular cultural and historical perspectives of the reader which are brought to bear on myth in the interpretative act, and how these might mesh together or clash with the potential historical and cultural implications of the particular artist’s portrayal of the mythological material. In other words, we must identify the existence or lack of points of confluence between the mythic artwork’s function *within* and *outside of* a particular historical or cultural moment, couching these in the specific terms of its own form as a piece of visual art, literature, or music. Gould explains further:

³⁶Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 36.

³⁷Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 66.

The meaning of a poem, or of any literary event, can never be realistically subsumed under one function of language, but must move between the myth of its own historical function (the history of poetic language in which it exists) and its synchronic performance (the poem's particular statement). It has its own sequence and schemata no less than myth. Performance brings a poem into a dialectic between the mythicity of genre (a poem acts like 'poetry') and its intention to justify itself as both uniquely language and part of that genre [...] Whether we refer to the social context of the poem or to its intrasystemic structure, we find the same play between history (metonymy) and moment (metaphor).³⁸

Here, again, the conceptualization of the interpretative process as taking place within a delimited *space*, rather than over a period of *time* allows us to negotiate between and mutually accommodate the real-time performance context in which a musical artwork is received, or a piece of literature is read, or the particular moment in which a visual artwork is perceived by its audience, and the temporally removed context of its creation, and of the origin and reference of its mythological content. The deprivileging of chronological precedence within the spatial paradigm effects a basic equity of value and status to the various manifestations of a particular myth which are drawn together within the single interpretative space. In this way, the reader is diverted from unnecessary and unhelpful preoccupation with designating an authentic, original, authoritative instantiation of a particular myth, and various responses to it in later works. Ostensibly, we need no longer concern ourselves with the question of which came first, the chicken or the egg. Both chicken and egg are subsumed within an interpretative space which considers them in parallel, as varied manifestations of the same essential thing: the chicken was once the egg, and that state of being is always recognizable within the essence of the chicken; and the egg always already has the potential to be the chicken, because it is the chicken, just presented in an alternative format. Thus rather than reading Wagner's *Ring* cycle as the culmination

³⁸Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 111-112.

of a progression from the original Nordic and German mythology, as documented in such sources as the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Völsunga Saga*, the *Poetic Edda* and *Prose Edda*, and *Thidriks Saga af Bern*, and later glossed through such commentaries as Jacob Grimm's *German Mythology* and Wilhelm Grimm's *The German Hero-Saga*, we instead interpret the tetralogy as standing in dialogue with these, and its numerous other, *paratextual* sources,³⁹ considered within a single interpretative space, and without prejudice based on chronological sequence.

1.3.2 Semiotics and Bridging the Gap

Having established that mythological narratives translate to their readers something unknown – unquantifiable in language, elements of the collective unconscious – and that we may discern, through the interpretative process, our position in relation to these encoded aspects of human experience, it seems a natural step to consider the role of semiotics in expanding the scope of our understanding of the mythic. Semiology posits the relationship between a symbol, the 'signifier', and that which it represents, the 'signified'. In the process of interpretation, the reader, or 'subject' must engage with the analogical system through which mythological narratives impart their potential meaning, in order to navigate and negotiate the distance between the signs with which he or she is confronted, and realize in their own unique interpretation the latent, malleable meaning therein. Partaking in mythological discourse renders the subject able to occupy the gap between event and meaning long enough to glimpse the relative positions of Self and Other in the unconscious, despite our inability to

³⁹While the discussion of paratexts in the case studies contained in this thesis must be reasonably limited by restrictions on the scope of the project, there is of course an extensive range of further paratextual sources – delineated by the reader's cultural exposure – which might be brought into such discussions.

express in language that which we observe. By accepting the infinite potentiality of mythological meaning and interpreting mythological signifiers on these terms, the reader is enabled to 'locate and further yield some kind of socially acceptable mode, some moral/intellectual/conceptual space which is the point that enables us to find in the work unity, significance, and consolidated pleasure.'⁴⁰

Looking at mythic narratives in purely linguistic terms, it is evident that the reader is always, inevitably, bound by the restrictive capacity of language to express only that which is analogous, metaphorical or figurative – that is, that which may be termed a 'signifier'. In describing something metonymically, mythic narratives invite the reader to locate and attempt to navigate the distance between the sign and its meaning, while simultaneously marking the impossibility of forging that path in words. The infinite range of potential meaning codified by mythic signs is stretched out in a synchronic space, perceived by the reader as 'polysemy [...] as real language *in the face of* the lack which lies at the heart of all discourse: the gap between words and things which forces language to offer transforming versions of an original signifier.'⁴¹ Mythic artworks, in their constant state of openness to pluralistic interpretation, can be characterized as 'sign systems in the process of transformation through the intent to interpret';⁴² their narratives exist by cyclically renewing the interpretative process through an inherent abstraction of signifier towards the signified, as perceived by individual readers. Gould describes the semiological function of myth in mediating between individual and society thus:

⁴⁰Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 60.

⁴¹Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 54-5.

⁴²Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 134-35.

A myth is a structure of the human mind at work, solving intellectual and social compromise. It provides a logical model capable of revealing presence and absence and even of overcoming contradictions and suggesting a unity to sequence and schemata. Myth also provides an optimistic diagram of the potential of the human intelligence to recognize truth. In that sense, it is as rigorous as scientific logic, even though the function of the logical model is entirely dependent on the way language works. Mythology – indeed, each myth – Lévi-Strauss is saying, is linguistically a cybernetic system, always providing mediation between its own terms. It is a self-conscious form constantly seeking the details of its own justification. As such, it is a coded message from a society to its members – for language is a social fact – and never ceases to keep that message in motion.⁴³

Discussion of the manner in which mythic narratives mandate the reader to explore the semiological gap between signifier and signified, and in parallel between self and Other, leads to an affirmation of the role of binary oppositions in determining the Structuralist approach to signification: the Structuralist is not interested in ‘things’ but only in ‘differential perceptions, that is to say, a sense of the *identity* of a given element which derives solely from our awareness of its *differences* from other elements, and ultimately from an implicit comparison of it with its own opposite.’⁴⁴ Dialectical relations permeate all discourse on the nature and function of mythological narratives; indeed, we might echo Claude Lévi-Strauss in locating the structural blueprint of mythological narratives in human interpretative efforts, in our ‘attempts to make the concrete intelligible by resorting to the abstract (and the reverse).’⁴⁵ We may now express the quest for self-knowledge requisite in mythological artworks in semiological terms, acknowledging the irony that for the achievement of essential self-awareness, the self must fulfil an objective function as signifier, thereby acting as subject to

⁴³Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 107.

⁴⁴Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 86.

⁴⁵Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 92.

another signifier, and ultimately being found paradoxically only in the Other.⁴⁶

Our key focus, here, must be the ontological gap, present in all myth, between event and meaning. The gap cannot be delineated in words, which means its interpretative possibilities are endless, and the stimulus for interpretation can never be properly satisfied. Here, then, we can locate the source of myth's timelessness and thus its suitability for discussion in spatial terms. If we view the chronological progression of time as playing out along a horizontal axis – rather like a graphic timeline – we can map the synchronic perception of the gap between the two sides of each characterization of the foundational binary opposition on a vertical axis, suspended, yet never static, in a spatial paradigm. The events contained within mythological narratives function as signifiers which 're-enact continually [...] the alternative closing and widening in discourse of the gap between the inside and the outside. They thereby inspire our ratiocination, creative fantasy, and above all, our process of interpreting the world as a sign system [...] It is always the structural operations of the act of interpretation rather than the content of motifs which leads to our sense of the archetypal and, we hope, to a meaning for the unconscious.'⁴⁷ What we perceive in the gap, is our own projection of Being into that which is unknown, the unconscious, Heidegger's Nothing.⁴⁸ Readers must not only engage the myth on its own terms, but additionally they must contribute something of themselves in order to facilitate the translation of the signified into the language of Being, as Gould asserts: 'For a mythological narrative to have any useful meaning there must be some human release from the fantastic reference of its terms [...] There is [...] some logic to

⁴⁶Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 78.

⁴⁷Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 68-9.

⁴⁸*Cf.* Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010).

the metaphor, some interchangeability between the outside fact (mythology itself) and the inside (my knowledge of human nature) which allows me to interpret the tale.’⁴⁹ Gould suggests that myth’s existence is predicated on our need to ensure continuous signification as a method of concealing the synonymous relationship of the unconscious and Nothing. In the context of Modernist art, we must question the creation of mythological narratives with regard to their evocation of the bilateral nature of experience, since the modernist interrogates language, its preconceptions and its boundaries, as the ‘ground of discovery.’⁵⁰

1.4 Spatial Form: Translation from Literature to Music

The lack of temporal lock inherent in myth qualifies it for investigation in terms of ‘spatial form’, a critical theory described by Jeffrey Smitten as being ‘allied to strands of modernist thought that would come to prominence after 1945 and that are still enormously influential today.’⁵¹ Joseph Frank’s seminal article of 1945 ‘Spatial Form in Modern Literature’ presents this theory, the central tenets of which may be applied not only to literary but, as I will demonstrate in this thesis, musical works, especially those which are based on mythology, and which might have the potential to be admitted to the hallowed halls of modernist art.

Frank’s theory builds upon the commonly accepted identification of synchronic elements in all narrative, simply extending that concept and thereby elevating it to the level of a primary mode of critical analysis. Ivo Vidan explains this transformation: ‘To insist on simultaneity in the perception of a literary work – a poem or novel –

⁴⁹Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 46.

⁵⁰Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 43.

⁵¹Smitten and Daghistany, ‘Introduction’, 31.

may seem to confuse the natural media of artistic expression. Yet the non-naturalistic tendency in modern art, Frank shows, reduces perspectives to surfaces, and motion to a moment of stasis, and transforms “the historical imagination into myth”.⁵² Smitten and Daghistany define the concept of spatial form as follows: ‘Spatial form in its simplest sense designates the techniques by which novelists subvert the chronological sequence inherent in narrative. Portions of a narrative may be connected without regard to chronology through such devices as image patterns, leitmotifs, analogy and contrast.’⁵³ Think, for example, of the juxtaposition at the opening of Act I, Scene 2 of *Götterdämmerung* of Hagen’s ‘Heil Siegfried, teurer Held!’ with the musical invocation of the curse motif, first established in *Das Rheingold*. To this, we must add Frank’s own explanation, which correlates with the process of interpretation discussed earlier:

Synchronic relations *within* the text take precedence over diachronic referentiality; only after the pattern of synchronic relations has been grasped as a *unity* can the meaning of the text be understood. Naturally to work out such synchronic relations involves the time-act of reading; but the temporality of this act is no longer co-ordinated with the dominant structural elements of the text. Temporality becomes, as it were, a purely physical limit of apprehension, which conditions but does not determine the work, and whose expectations are thwarted and superseded by the space-logic of synchronicity.⁵⁴

Returning briefly to the earlier description of the three-level interpretative process, and also the predominance of binary oppositions, the specific relevance of Frank’s spatial form theory becomes clear, as Foust explains: ‘Binary opposites are like Frank’s reflexive reference. This also allows the reader to distinguish a perpetually shifting variety of levels of contrast, thereby placing the contrasted elements at momentary rest

⁵²Joseph Frank, ‘Spatial Form in Modern Literature’, *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 60; quoted in Vidan, ‘Time and Sequence in Spatial Fiction’, 131.

⁵³Smitten and Daghistany, ‘Introduction’, 13.

⁵⁴Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 75.

in the reader's mind at various levels of an imagined hierarchy of metaphors. While at rest they continue to resonate, awaiting augmentation and, finally, completion as the total pattern(s) of the work become(s) clear in the simultaneous spatial grasp of the work's *significant* form.⁵⁵

Spatial form was developed by Frank as a critical tool with which to examine and explain interruptions, arrests and distortions of linear narrative progression in twentieth-century modernist literature. His original theory is demonstrated through its practical application to the definitively modern poetry of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, and the epitome of the modernist novel – James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Of this monumental work, Frank writes: 'Joyce composed his novel of an infinite number of references and cross-references which relate to one another independently of the time-sequence of the narrative; and, before the book fits together into any meaningful pattern, these references must be connected by the reader and viewed as a whole.'⁵⁶ Spatial analyses thus explicate totality as 'an aggregate of parts' rather than 'an ordered, sequential whole', and in order to maintain some coherence within individual works, thematic content takes primary importance over development. David Mickelsen argues that there are two basic categories of narrative theme in this respect: 'portraits of individuals and tableaux of societies.'⁵⁷ I do not see these two types of theme as mutually exclusive – indeed, in all of the works on which my research focuses, portraits of individuals occupy the foreground of the narrative, while the wider plight of their community is of deeper significance. Ian

⁵⁵Foust, 'The Aporia of Recent Criticism and the Contemporary Significance of Spatial Form', 196.

⁵⁶Frank, 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature: Part I', 232.

⁵⁷David Mickelsen, 'Types of Spatial Structure in Narrative', *Spatial Form in Narrative*, 71.

Watt observes that in modernist literature, ‘the importance of plot [story, under my model] is in inverse proportion to that of character’;⁵⁸ and Mickelsen expands upon this, writing that ‘modern fiction certainly supports this thesis: the teeming world of nineteenth-century narrative is often narrowed in the twentieth century to an individual, and the world becomes an adjunct to or function of that character [...] To allow a full and undistracted exploration of the protagonist, other characters (hence ‘action’) are eliminated or greatly reduced in importance; action moves inward. The goal is to expose an individual’s complexities, especially the multiple factors resulting in any given decision or state of mind.’⁵⁹ This observation is easily made with the works which motivated Frank’s original theory, and it finds an evident parallel in the musical works under speculation in my research – one need look no further than the titles of these works for evidence of the strong focus on a particular individual in Tippett’s *King Priam*, Vaughan Williams’ *Job*, and Maxwell Davies’ *Sea Orpheus*.⁶⁰

1.5 The Interpretative Paradigm

1.5.1 Drawing the Past and Present Together Within a Common Space

The synchronic dimension allows the reader to identify direct points of comparison between his/her own personal experience, and that embodied in the mythological narrative, constituting Christopher Butler’s ‘highly allusive compromise with the past’.⁶¹ On this point, Frank suggests that the theory might additionally be applied

⁵⁸Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 279.

⁵⁹Mickelsen, ‘Types of Spatial Structure in Narrative’, 70.

⁶⁰Although note that in the poem from which *Sea Orpheus* takes its title and subject, Eurydice, not Orpheus, is actually the focus (see chapter 5, section 2.2).

⁶¹Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music, and Painting in Europe, 1900–1916*, 258; quoted in Saylor, “‘It’s not lambkins frisking at all’”, 45.

to works outside of twentieth-century modernism, drawing a parallel with medieval art: 'The great works of Modernism are thus analogous to those examples of medieval sculpture or book illustration in which figures from the Old and New Testaments, classical antiquity and sometimes local history are all grouped together as part of one timeless complex of significance.'⁶² As the following passage from Julio Cortazar makes clear, however, the synchronous perception of temporal parallels must not be mistaken for actual synonymity:

To accustom one's self to use the expression *figure* instead of *image*, to avoid confusions. Yes, everything coincides. But it is not a question of a return to the Middle Ages or anything like it. The mistake of postulating an absolute historical time: There are different times *even though* they may be parallel. In this sense, one of the times of the so-called Middle Ages can coincide with one of the times of the Modern Ages. And that time is what has been perceived and inhabited by painters and writers who refuse to seek support in what surrounds them, to be "modern" in the sense that their contemporaries understand them, which does not mean that they choose to be anachronistic; they are simply on the margin of the superficial time of their period, and from that other time where everything confirms to the condition of *figure*, where everything has value as a sign and not as a theme of description, they attempt a work which may seem alien or antagonistic to the time and history surrounding them, and which nonetheless includes it, explains it, and in the last analysis orients it towards a transcendence within whose limits man is waiting.⁶³

Since 'modern literature has been engaged in transmuting the time world of history into the timeless world of myth,'⁶⁴ it is myth that forms 'the common content of modern literature [and] that finds its appropriate aesthetic expression in spatial form.'⁶⁵ Frank's concluding statement is arguably transferable to the musical repertory to be investigated in the present study.

⁶²Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form*, 77.

⁶³Julio Cortazar, *Hopscotch*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: New American Library, 1975), 488-9.

⁶⁴Frank, 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature', *The Widening Gyre*, 60.

⁶⁵Foust, 'The Aporia of Recent Criticism and the Contemporary Significance of Spatial Form', 181.

1.5.2 Spatial Form in Relation to Twentieth- and Twenty-first-century Artworks

Through modernist mythological art, history is perceived as ‘a continuum in which distinctions of past and present are obliterated [...] past and present are seen spatially, locked in a timeless unity which, even if accentuating surface differences, eliminates any feeling of historical sequence by the very act of juxtaposition.’⁶⁶ The implicit rejection of linear time and teleological narrative in twentieth-century modernist aesthetics which can be seen to motivate a spatial, rather than temporal, perspective constitutes the fundamental ‘movement of cultural reality’ which Frank suggests must be understood and embraced in order to represent a Hegelian ‘idea’ of merit. In this way, his theory of spatial form may be viewed, as he suggests, as ‘much more than simply a provocative critical paradox.’⁶⁷ Given the threat of global chaos present at the forefront of social and political consciousness for large spans of the twentieth-century and still in the twenty-first century, it is in some ways unsurprising that artists and their interpreters can be seen to have responded to the evident appeal of a technique of narrative construction and interpretative deconstruction that privileges a sense of something bigger and more significant than the everyday striving for forward progression which could very well be rendered futile by the imminent threat of societal collapse and irreversible destruction. As David Mickelsen writes: ‘Spatial structures acknowledge that we are not linear in our being. Existence is a complex, multiform totality in which any given element is tangential to countless others. Discarding a causal, linear organisation at least moves *toward* an

⁶⁶Frank, ‘Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Three Parts: Part III’, *The Sewanee Review* 53/4 (1945), 653.

⁶⁷Frank, ‘Spatial Form: Thirty Years After’, 243.

organic conception of life, a life in which events are not so much discernible points on a line as they are random (and often simultaneous) occurrences in a seamless web of experience. Spatial form conveys a sense of the scope of life rather than its magnificence or “length”.⁶⁸

Frank writes of the particular suitability of spatial form analysis to inform our understanding of artworks created under the conditions of twentieth-century Modernist aesthetics:

Man now lives in a world whose contours are provided, not by the intellect of the scientists, but by the myths of Crisis, Apocalypse, Decadence, and the End, and by the existential need to give shape and pattern to the unendurable meaninglessness of pure temporal duration. Just as, according to Wallace Stevens, the poetic imagination projects its metaphors onto bare materiality to endow nature with metaphysical significance, so the imagination of Western man, living in the rectilinear time of a crumbling Judeo-Christian civilization, projects the myths of his religion onto the course of events and locates within such structures the meaning of his own life.⁶⁹

Roland Barthes has written of the ideal plural text as containing myriad networks which ‘interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*, they are indeterminable [...] the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language.’⁷⁰ It is possible to see many modernist artworks based on mythology in this light, but additionally on a broader scale, to see the specific myths of a particular culture and

⁶⁸Mickelsen, ‘Types of Spatial Structure in Narrative’, 77.

⁶⁹Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form*, 88.

⁷⁰Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 56.

even global, international mythology as a whole in this manner. Spatial form analysis creates the possibility for the examination of all of these aspects of a particular text without the restrictions imposed by a dominating sense of linear progression.

The particular suitability of spatial analysis for modernist, mythological artworks is confirmed by James Curtis: 'If time represented the old world, space represented the new; twentieth-century Modernists proclaimed themselves the proponents of space and structure, not time and sequence. By associating space with structure, Modernists could associate structure with meaning, and meaning with external, mythical existence; as they witnessed the disintegration of the world into which they had been born, they sought permanent meaning all the more vigorously. For many Modernists, art had ceased to express moral absolutes and began to express ontological absolutes.'⁷¹ In order to successfully interpret such a work, the reader must visualize its content, in its entirety, in a single temporal moment. He or she has to survey the nexus of signposts, pathways and landmarks which lie before him or her, in order to accurately locate and comprehend any single articulation, removed as it is from a position within a pre-defined journey through time. As such, modern writers and readers are confident 'that in any random fragment plucked from the course of a life at any time the totality of its fate is contained and can be portrayed.'⁷² Thus Wotan is at once powerful and autonomous, and impotent and resigned to his own destruction; Brünnhilde is always already powerless human woman, an object to be won by a worthy man, even when she is presented as a Valkyrie, and Wotan's favourite daughter; and Siegfried's fate is sealed even before the opera in which he is conceived

⁷¹James M. Curtis, 'Spatial Form in the Context of Modernist Aesthetics', *Spatial Form in Narrative*, 165.

⁷²Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 484.

begins. Foust too suggests that spatial form theory is inherently suited to specifically twentieth-century mythological works, writing that ‘Frank uses the notion of myth in the modern sense to mean a sophisticated device allowing writers to find an adequate structuring technique for their visions in an otherwise formless epoch not conducive to the production of integrated works of art. He interprets this use of myth as a *conscious* manipulation by the artist that reflects modern man’s existential freedom.’⁷³

1.6 Applied Interpretation

1.6.1 The Reader as Creator of Meaning

Smitten and Daghistany claim that spatial form is ‘a critical theory applicable to the entire genre of narrative fiction, and at the same time it is situated squarely in the mainstream of modernist criticism.’⁷⁴ I wish to suggest that it might also be fruitfully applied to music which contains some semblance, whether subtle or outspoken, of narrative function. Smitten notes that spatial form ‘technique implies the creation of an effect in the reader’s mind – thus spatial form includes not only objective features of narrative structure, but also subjective processes of aesthetic perception. These processes are often conceived of as working in opposition to the linear flow of words in narrative.’⁷⁵ The idea is that the reader’s interpretation of a text (and here we must expand Frank’s conception of the text - outlined earlier - to a much broader definition not limited to the physical object of a literary work, much as we have accepted a broad characterization of the reader) is shaped by their own perception, and that the successful communication of the creator’s message, their motivation for invoking a

⁷³Foust, ‘The Aporia of Recent Criticism and the Contemporary Significance of Spatial Form’, 193.

⁷⁴Smitten and Daghistany, ‘Introduction’, 16.

⁷⁵Smitten and Daghistany, ‘Introduction’, 13.

particular myth, relies on what Mickelsen refers to as a ‘more active, perhaps even more sophisticated [implied reader] than that implied by most traditional fiction.’⁷⁶ Indeed, the crucial presence of the reader as the dialogic partner in the creator’s artistic communication must be reiterated here. The only legitimate interpretations of texts which exhibit spatiality are those which employ the focal lens of the intended reader: ‘spatial form is primarily a theory of perception that focuses on the reading process. Its prime rule is that the reader must engage the text on its own terms in a strenuously participatory reading that attempts to re-create the experience embodied in it. Meaning resides somewhere between the past activity of the author and the present activity of the engaged reader.’⁷⁷

The inherent relevance of a spatial approach for mythic narratives is summarized by Gould as he asserts that ‘in considering the problematic nature of archetypal significance, we have been directed to a tautology: if symbols – archetypal or not – have any human value at all, then they have the potentiality to be understood. And if this is not the case, then since understanding is always a matter of interpretation, it follows that the archetype must be interpretable for it to exist at all; that is, it must have a discernible presence, a context, and a history. An archetype must create some kind of code and enter some kind of a dialectic with a perceiving mind, and not merely be a vague memory from “the mists of time”.’⁷⁸ Foust writes that ‘Frank is primarily concerned with myth as the *necessary* content for the achievement of spatialisation’;⁷⁹ not only is spatial form theory a useful critical tool with which to interrogate mythological narratives, but as Frank suggests, we

⁷⁶Mickelsen, ‘Types of Spatial Structure in Narrative’, 74.

⁷⁷Foust, ‘The Aporia of Recent Criticism and the Contemporary Significance of Spatial Form’, 199.

⁷⁸Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 31.

⁷⁹Foust, ‘The Aporia of Recent Criticism and the Contemporary Significance of Spatial Form’, 181.

are obligated to acknowledge the role of myth in facilitating artistic responses to the condition of modernity, which he believes must occupy a predominantly spatial dimension.

1.6.2 Mediation of the Individual and the Universal

What remains is to consider the techniques of spatial form analysis as methods by which we are able to investigate individual artworks in terms of their mediation between reader and text, and by association individual and society. This association is a central tenet of Lévi-Strauss' anthropological theory, as Gould explains: Lévi-Strauss 'believes that anthropology is above all about reconciling the problems of metaphysics with the problems of actual human behaviour in society. That synthesis is no less the motive which underlies all mythology. It is an attractive but elusive insight, made difficult by the fact that Lévi-Strauss also understands that in mythology the problem is that of all symbolic discourse, of contending with *fictions* about human behavior as well as with the behavior itself.'⁸⁰ The embedded social dimension of mythological narratives is confirmed by Cassirer: 'Myth is an objectification of man's social experience, not of his individual experience.'⁸¹ Scholes and Kellogg have suggested that spatial narratives depend on 'observation of the present rather than investigation of the past [...] the "slice of life"';⁸² mythology mediates, through the illustration of a distant past, what may be the unpleasant realities of the present day, communicating them to the reader in a format that he/she is able to comprehend, assimilate, and interpret (free from any preoccupation with chronological, linear progression). In our observation of this process we can identify the semiotic gap

⁸⁰Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, 92.

⁸¹Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 47.

⁸²Robert Scholes and Robert L. Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: OUP, 1966), 13.

present in language, and the reader's engagement with the mythology that works to close it.

Frank refers to artists as 'always the most sensitive barometers of cultural change';⁸³ thus we may presume that their artworks transmit some semblance of the cultural context in which they are produced, perhaps even pre-figuring developments which have not yet had their naissance. Of greatest significance to the present study, is Foust's observation that 'both [spatial form and myth criticism] conceive of the function of literary structures to be projecting archetypes or prototypes that are nonetheless individual creations, a part of the poet's private symbol system. Literature performs a double function, since the private prototypes take on social significance by being mediations between the individual and his collective human environment';⁸⁴ arguably musical works can and do, as I will demonstrate through my research, fulfil this same double function.

1.7 Applying Spatial Form Analysis to Musical Works

The spatial interpretative framework informs and shapes the musical analytical methodology at the heart of this thesis. Its three constituent stages are mapped onto analytical processes as follows, yet in all three case studies discussion moves freely back and forth between the three levels of investigation while drawing comparisons between the musical work under scrutiny and its various paratexts, rather than considering either each level of analysis or each text discretely and in some sort of teleological order. The guiding focus on the musical works is purely pragmatic – their foregrounding is directed by their existence as the *musical* case studies, rather than

⁸³Frank, 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature: Part III', 648.

⁸⁴Foust, 'The Aporia of Recent Criticism and the Contemporary Significance of Spatial Form', 183.

because they constitute some sort of cumulative manifestations of their mythological material, a position which this thesis's foundational methodology vehemently seeks to discourage. The numerous instantiations of each of the myths of interest to this series of case studies will be treated variously as text and paratext(s), since under the spatial conceptual framework none of them are to be considered as primary, original, or authoritative, versions.

At the most detailed level, analysis of the intricate musical language of the works illustrates the myriad details of the narrative. Spatial narratives in other art-forms rely on techniques such as repetition, variation, opposition, and symmetry to define their construction; these are also, of course, easily discernible features of musical composition, and are complemented by other, more specifically musical characteristics, identified through detailed analyses of the works under scrutiny. The next layer of analysis concerns an individual work's coherence and significance as a whole. The analyst here must step back from the intricacies and individual elements of the musical language, and consider the broader patterns that emerge across the scope of the whole work, defining its structure and shape. The synthesis of these first two analytical perspectives facilitates the mapping of 'story' and 'plot', and illuminates instances of synergy and deviation between the two. Finally we may consider an intertextual macro-analysis of the work, positioning it in relation to its foundational mythological material, other artistic responses to that material, aspects of the work's extra-musical context, both at the time of its composition and subsequently, and potential interpretations of its content.

An outline of the spatial model is, therefore, swiftly achieved, but it is best shown through its exemplification at length. The same might be said, for instance, of the ethnographic method, whose processes are easily conceptualized but whose

enactment is relatively complex. Having demonstrated the need of such a method as a response to the modernist materials it seeks to examine, it will now be the task of the chapters of Parts II and III to enable its extended illustration, and to present the rewarding insights to be gained through its deployment, before the thesis's final conclusions are reached (in Part IV).

Part II

Myth and Opera

Chapter 2

King Priam: Questions of Form and Structure

In King Priam, Tippett ‘shows how music can be used to give concrete form to those stark and unanswerable eternal of experience which for millennia have provided a yardstick against which human sensibility can be measured.’ – Ian Kemp¹

2.1 Priam in the Twentieth Century: Concatenation of Past and Present

Recalling the composition of *King Priam*, Tippett wrote that ‘One does not go to a past work of art for the past, but for the present. It becomes one’s own work, to live or die on its own merits’;² though he selected a myth originating millennia into the past, he did so in order to comment upon his own age. In doing so, Tippett created something which would be realised in many different guises over subsequent years, in circumstances which would differ, to varying degrees, from those in which it had its genesis, but which would remain somehow trans-temporal. David Clarke writes of Tippett’s concern with expressing ‘man’s place in the world as we know it’, and identifies this place as outside of any specific geographical, cultural, political, or chronological location, a ‘dimension of existence putatively irreducible to any specific cultural, social or historical determination, as if occupying a natural, or indeed mythological, substratum.’³ Indeed, in Tippett’s operatic oeuvre as a whole, his

¹Ian Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music* (Oxford: OUP, 1984), 325.

²Michael Tippett, ‘The Resonance of Troy: Essays and Commentaries on *King Priam*’, *Tippett on Music*, ed. Meirion Bowen (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 217.

³David Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett: Modern Times and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 38.

characters – ordinary men and women – experience and endure conflict, in personal, local, national and global spheres, in a manner to which audience members – ordinary people – throughout the decades have been able to relate.

In Tippett's opera, the morbid fate of the characters is sealed from the very first scene, when the prophecy is revealed. From this point onwards, the audience is aware that the final outcome can only be Priam's death, and they interpret every element of the unfolding drama with this knowledge in mind. The concept of prophecy here mirrors the underlying premise upon which spatial interpretation is predicated: the deprivileging of the chronological timeline and concomitant prioritizing of synchronic perception results in the overriding concept that everything is *always already known*. Paris' exile and subsequent (if somewhat troubled) return to Troy as an adolescent, his angst-ridden departure for Sparta and war-provoking elopement back to Troy with Helen, and his revengeful departure to kill Achilles to seek redress for Hector's death and final return in death to the (now effectively dead) city of Troy fulfill three times over what Peter Burian describes as 'the pattern of the foundling's return [. . . which] clearly reflects the well-known *rite de passage* marked by separation from normal society and a period of liminality and testing, which, if successful, finally leads to reintegration into the social order at a new level.'⁴ True to tragic tradition, death as a defining characteristic of the genre is particularly highlighted in *King Priam*. Not only do all of the main characters, Trojan and Greek, die during the course of the opera, but the audience is painfully aware of the inevitability of their deaths from the very beginning, and the shadow of mortality overhangs the entire opera.

⁴Peter Burian, 'Myth into *muthos*: the Shaping of Tragic Plot', *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P. E. Easterling (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 187.

2.2 *King Priam* as a Turning Point for Tippett

It is often remarked that audiences initially encountered (and doubtless still encounter) difficulties when attempting to grapple with Tippett's dissonant and fragmented musical and narrative structures. Anthony Milner comments that 'the general concert public is still baffled by the majority of his works [...] This difficulty is not a fault of the composer, but of his audiences. There is only one way to remove it: frequent hearings of his works.'⁵ This is an extremely problematic assertion; however, if we accept that it may prove true at least for some listeners, perhaps revival productions and the new availability of both audio and visual recordings have contributed to the growth in appreciation of the work initially observed by Hugh Macdonald.⁶ It seems natural that this would have been a particular problem with *King Priam* if we accept the general consensus that the opera marked a distinctive new direction in Tippett's output.

Tippett's relationship to the compositional climate against the backdrop of which he composed *King Priam* is both complex and controversial, and has shaped much of the extant scholarship on both this particular work and Tippett as composer of both opera and instrumental music. Testimony from both primary and secondary accounts of the composer and his works demonstrates that Tippett did not align himself with any specific compositional school or movement, and indeed that he proceeded in a certain degree of isolation from any particular establishment. It is thus interesting to consider not only styles and ideas with which Tippett's works show no affinity, but also those that the composer actively wished to challenge through his

⁵Anthony Milner, 'The Music of Michael Tippett', *The Musical Quarterly*, 1/4 (1964), 423.

⁶Hugh Macdonald, 'Review', *Tempo (New Series)* 141 (1971), 42.

music. In particular it is his relation to post-war modernism that provides some of the greatest potential for examining Tippett's compositional language, particularly in *King Priam*, on a variety of different levels.

David Cairns describes Tippett's somewhat isolated position on the map of twentieth-century musical composition, asserting that 'his genius was hidden from the avant-garde by the very nature of what he was trying to bring about, the renewal of musical tradition from within – an exercise which to the post-Webern generation of composers could only seem futile and irrelevant [...] Yet he was not part of the English establishment either. Tippett was always his own master.'⁷ Milner observes that '[Tippett's music] stands outside what the fashionable journalism of the moment considers to be the main path of twentieth-century music, for it is the work of a composer who habitually thinks in large designs and broad spans, avoiding the avant-garde preoccupation with miniscule methods of composition.'⁸ The tendencies of Milner's 'fashionable journalism' in the mid-1960s seem to have persisted over subsequent decades, even becoming ingrained in academic writing, at least until the challenges to the accepted definition and primacy of modernism presented by musicologists such as Susan McClary, Richard Taruskin, and Lawrence Kramer, and the growth of what had previously been designated 'peripheral' studies, such as ethnomusicology, gender musicology, and pop musicology, since the 1980s.

Tippett himself, looking back over his career, confirmed the difficulties he encountered, particularly with the reception of his works, arising from his deliberate distancing from the European avant-garde:

⁷David Cairns, 'Sir Michael Tippett: 1905-1998. Images of Beauty', *The Musical Times* 139/1861 (1998), 4.

⁸Milner, 'The Music of Michael Tippett', 423.

I didn't belong to the serial school and had not considered the post-war Darmstadt courses [...] as the Mecca of the avant-garde. Much of the time my music has come up against an implacable serialist dogma, resistant to alternative compositional approaches. The signs of change have come only lately [during the late 1980s], through the efforts of highly idiosyncratic figures [...] and through a few major successes like the 1988 production of *King Priam* at Nancy.⁹

It is interesting to note here that Tippett specifically mentions a production of *King Priam* as marking a change in the position of his music in the history books of twentieth-century composition. Perhaps this work, more than any other, serves to justify the reconsideration of Tippett's oeuvre as a whole as part of the reformulation of disciplinary priorities that has begun to take place since the 1980s, particularly since, as John Harbison observes, 'Tippett, never participant nor aspirant to the advanced guard, remained even after his drastic changes so quirky and indeed so philosophically alien to the European scene, an outsider, even though *King Priam* was the beginning of his real acceptance within England.'¹⁰

Although initial reception of *King Priam* was positive at both Coventry and Covent Garden, Macdonald suggests that both public and academic appreciation of the opera grew further in the ensuing decades, writing in 1971 that 'one can't help feeling that we are only just catching up, that this opera which seemed so grittily dialectical in the sixties has now found its time.'¹¹ Indeed, the volume of scholarship on Tippett's life and works, and in particular that pertaining to the opera itself, has grown enormously in recent years. Yet the composer is still not afforded the same volume of academic attention and critical inquiry enjoyed by his European peers, reflecting the more general failure of twentieth-century British musical composition

⁹Michael Tippett, *Those Twentieth-Century Blues: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), 250.

¹⁰John Harbison, 'Six Tanglewood Talks (4,5,6)', *Perspectives of New Music* 24/1 (1985), 49.

¹¹Macdonald, 'Review', 42.

to assert itself alongside disciplinary priorities (as identified in the introduction to this thesis), and partly also perhaps an unease with British music (and its suspected imperialist associations¹²) within the current ideological discourse of the academy. Naturally I think renewed engagement of this kind is important.

King Priam stands apart from its predecessors in Tippett's oeuvre in several respects. Indeed, Milner goes as far as to suggest that 'at first hearing, *King Priam* seems to exclude almost everything characteristic of its composer's previous achievement.'¹³ Clarke suggests that the opera presents a 'profound problematisation of Tippett's previous visionary aspirations.'¹⁴ Ian Kemp describes this dichotomous relationship between the work and its predecessors at some length, demonstrating (albeit unwittingly) its particular suitability for spatial analysis:

Tippett's musical ideas could previously have been described in terms of becoming, unfolding, growth, development. While these qualities were never lost sight of, the accent now lay elsewhere. The meanings behind his ideas are compacted into single statements. They present; they encapsulate; they characterise in a single gesture. Because they have acquired fixed, aphoristic qualities, they oblige Tippett to construct by accumulation rather than development. This feature is underlined by a method of instrumentation in which unchanging and highly characteristic timbres (defined as that arising when an instrument sounds least like any other) are presented either in stark isolation or in unusual, spare and even somewhat coarse-grained combinations. This, in turn, is underlined by a pungent harmonic language. If contrapuntal textures create a sense of flow and harmonic ones a sense of arrest, it was inevitable that *King Priam* should demand of Tippett a much more overtly 'harmonic' style than before.¹⁵

¹²Cf. Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876-1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

¹³Milner, 'The Music of Michael Tippett', 436.

¹⁴Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett*, 4.

¹⁵Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*, 334.

2.3 Application of the Methodological Framework

The inherent potential for the mutual mediation of universal (the level of story) and particular (the level of individual subjectivity) constituted in ancient mythology forms the unifying lens through which Tippett's *King Priam* (1958-62) is presented in this second part of the thesis. The work is considered in conjunction with its various paratexts, identifying points of confluence through spatial macro-analysis. In a similar vein, the opera is investigated as a social artwork, assessing the role of the work's foundational mythology in maintaining the semiotic gap between the reader and aspects of a 'universal experience' which we cannot ordinarily rationalize or understand, and details of its musical expression with which the reader is able to engage in order for the mediating function to be fulfilled. Discussion moves freely between the three levels of the spatial analytical framework elaborated in the introduction to this thesis, in accordance with the absence of chronological ordering to its principles.

The nature and character of my own interrogation of Tippett's opera hinges on the extent to which I feel I am able to understand both the opera's music and dramaturgy as complementary partners in an artwork, and to which the work mediates some sense of identification with the composer, or more generally with a 'man of his time'. The former reaction relies upon in-depth musical and narratological analysis, taking into account both formalist and hermeneutic analytical principles and relevant literary paratexts, and deploying a variety of techniques in order to make sense of the notes and words on the page, and the very specific ways in which Tippett has married them together. The latter is more complex, and involves the contextualisation of the results of this analysis within the socio-cultural and political spheres both of the

work's genesis and of my own present-day locus, and within a larger musical and mythological repertory. On a meta-analytical level, insight into the power of this music to compel active engagement and participation on the part of its reader, and a re-thinking of the defining characteristics of British musical modernism repays this close study of *King Priam* in its literary and musical contexts.

Arnold Whittall draws a parallel between the characters in *King Priam* and the analyst who would delve into the work's complexities, quoting Kemp: 'by their nature and circumstances [...] they] are forced to make impossible decisions and live with the inevitably disastrous consequences.'¹⁶ If we move away from the idea that there can be a 'correct' manner in which to interpret the work, however, then it is possible to view the endeavours of the work's reader in slightly more positive terms. In approaching Tippett's opera, the engaged spatial reader must enter into an active, dialogic process, contributing something of themselves into the interpretative space in which they interact with the work, and making challenging decisions, which lead to revelatory consequences which have the potential themselves to present further challenges. To turn Whittall's parallel around, it is more productive to see *King Priam*'s characters *as readers themselves*, engaging in the spatial interpretative process with regard to their own narrative existence.

In alignment with the methodological approach elucidated in the introduction to the thesis, this initial chapter on *King Priam* presents a discussion of the form and structure of Tippett's opera, parsed in terms of the overarching mapping of the narrative's story and plot. Specific aspects of the work's formal design, and Tippett's

¹⁶Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*, 355; quoted in Arnold Whittall, '“Is there a choice at all?” *King Priam* and Motives for Analysis', *Tippett Studies*, ed. David Clarke (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 72.

structural techniques, are illuminated and contextualized by paratextual comparison with Hyginus' *Fabulae*, Homer's *Iliad*, the corpus of fifth-century Athenian tragic drama, and musical works by Richard Wagner, Benjamin Britten, and Igor Stravinsky.

2.4 *King Priam* and its Literary Paratexts

Examination of *King Priam* with its paratexts at every level of the spatial analytical framework reveals a wealth of interpretative possibilities pertaining to Tippett's unique fusion of ideas from a wide range of intellectual fountains, and particularly to the originality with which the resultant work stands as fertile ground for readings shaped in part by synthesis of innumerate aspects of such paratexts with Tippett's own individual outlook and sense of creative aesthetics. An investigation into the manner in which *King Priam* and its paratexts mediate one another delineates several potentially fruitful lines of inquiry which might offer a deeper understanding of the hermeneutic potential of the opera, particularly concerning the question of destiny, the social implications of armed conflict, and Tippett's personal critique of the specific socio-political and religious dogmas that loomed at the time of its composition.

A wealth of literary works, philosophical texts, and works of drama spanning over two millennia stand as paratexts in the interpretative space in which the spatial reader engages with *King Priam*. Tippett was fascinated by what he referred to endearingly as 'ideas and intellectual things' from an early age. As a result of his education at a fee-paying school delivering a traditional curriculum, he was well-versed in Greek literature, both epic poems and plays, and immersed himself during his adolescence in the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato. He writes of these Hellenic traditions, along with the 'wayward, hermetic, semi-mystical philosophy' of the Ancient Egyptians and Gnostics, and later Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as

‘food for my creative imagination.’¹⁷ As an adult, Tippett became familiar with the ideas of Carl Gustav Jung and Friedrich Nietzsche – the latter mostly through the interpretations of his theories by such individuals as the poet and playwright W. B. Yeats. Of particular relevance to *King Priam* is one specific work by French philosopher and sociologist Lucien Goldmann, *Le dieu caché*,¹⁸ which will be discussed in further detail below.

2.4.1 The Story

An initial paratext for consideration as part of a spatial purview of *King Priam* is the Ancient Greek mythology which gives rise to the opera’s story. From Hyginus’ *Fabulae* Tippett constructed a prologue relating the story of Paris’s birth and childhood. Homer’s *Iliad* then provided a wealth of material from which Tippett could select those events crucial to a narrative which would enable him to convey the most pertinent and all-pervading of philosophical quandaries, namely, ‘the mysterious nature of human choice’.¹⁹ The composer himself wrote emphatically of the centrality to the opera’s libretto of the relationships between its characters; these act as the narrative genesis far more than the seemingly overarching theme of the Trojan War, the backdrop against which the opera’s events play out.²⁰ This directive encapsulates the suitability of the spatial interpretative model for application to this work; the composer’s intended focus is the broader picture within which all elements of the narrative are drawn together, rather than a chronological series of individual, consequential events

¹⁷Tippett, *Those Twentieth-Century Blues*, 15.

¹⁸Lucien Goldmann, *Le dieu caché* (Paris: 1955); English translation *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, trans. Philip Thody (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

¹⁹Tippett, quoted in Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*, 326.

²⁰Tippett, ‘The Resonance of Troy’, 215.

in a particular quasi-historical conflict.

A prophecy foretells that Paris will cause his father's death. Priam cannot act on his wife Hecuba's advice to kill Paris, and instead gives instruction for him to be exposed (abandoned on a mountainside). But kindly servants give the baby to shepherds, who raise him as their own. Years later, the servants observe Paris's return to the city and his family with foreboding, but are interrupted by revellers at the wedding of Hector to Andromache who reveal that Hector and Paris do not get on, and that Paris has left Troy for the court of Menelaus in Sparta. In Sparta, Paris and Helen (Menelaus' wife) have become lovers, and to demonstrate the power and will of the gods over the fate of mortals, Paris is forced to choose between the three goddesses Athena, Hera and Aphrodite – he chooses Aphrodite, represented by Helen, and is cursed by the other two.

Meanwhile, Troy is under siege from Menelaus and the Greek army. Tired of ten years of war, the Greek hero Achilles is refusing to fight, so in order to re-galvanise the troops, his devoted companion and lover Patroclus goes into battle wearing Achilles' armour. Watching invisibly under the protection of Hermes, the Old Man begs the god to warn Priam of the danger, but in Troy, Paris is already announcing to the king that Hector has slain Patroclus in single combat. The father and sons sing a trio of thanks for the victory, but they are interrupted by the chilling sound of Achilles' war-cry, taken up and echoed by the Greek army.

Hector's death is now inevitable, and inside the city of Troy Andromache and Hecuba lament the futility of war and the inescapability of their fate. Hecuba reveals that the war is no longer being fought over Helen, but that the Greeks will not rest until they have taken the city of Troy. Paris brings King Priam the news of Hector's death. Priam curses his surviving son, wishing him dead as well, and Paris goes,

swearing not to return until he has killed Achilles in revenge. Priam is transported to Achilles' tent, where he begs for Hector's body. Achilles agrees and the two look ahead to their own deaths: Achilles to be killed by Paris, and Priam to be killed by Neoptolemus, Achilles' son. Troy is in ruins. Priam refuses to leave his city, and one by one his family leaves him. His last farewell is with Helen, to whom he speaks gently. There is a moment of stillness before Achilles' son appears to strike the fatal blow and Hermes departs for Olympus.

As readers, we may wonder what caused Tippett to choose to compose his second opera around the story of the Trojan War. As engaged, spatial readers, we might more easily comprehend the mediating function of the mythological narrative, and look past Tippett's general interest in Hellenic cultural heritage at the myriad possibilities for the creation of multifarious, open-ended dialogue between composer and reader inherent in its fundamental nature as myth. By selecting a mythic war which was both legendary and temporally distanced from the present-day context of the opera's creation and subsequent realisations on stage, Tippett ensured the broadest possible potential for reader engagement; his opera, and its hermeneutic potential, would be accessible to all imaginable audiences, since no-one watching it would have directly experienced the conflict in question. Tippett's personal reflections on war are refracted through the lens of the opera's dramatic and musical language to illuminate a spectrum of potential interpretations open to personal appropriation by individual engaged readers who contribute something of themselves into the interpretative space, allowing the mythological material to mediate simultaneously Tippett's social commentary and the reader's own understanding and experience of conflict. The wide scale of the work's hermeneutic potential is ensured by the transient nature of its mythological narrative – this is not connected with any particular time

or place, and thus has the potential to be more widely relevant. The opera's narrative is as free as possible from preconceptions stemming from personal experience of any particular conflict, offering the greatest potential for mediation of the experience of conflict, a common part of human existence. Arnold Whittall confirms this hypothesis, and suggests that this may even have been a subconscious decision on the part of the composer, writing that 'Tippett's *natural inclination* was to turn away from direct associations with the local and national [...] and towards] archetypes and universals.'²¹

Andrew Porter reports that Tippett chose the Trojan War, rather than a more modern conflict, because of its 'magnitude'.²² Further weight is lent to this assertion by the composer himself, who wrote extensively on the reputation of the myth and its ingrained status within European cultural heritage.

For the purposes of enjoying, receiving, experiencing the opera, one need know nothing about the story of Troy, because the resonances that sound in all of us when we speak of Troy arise from generations, centuries of European concern with that immortal story. There are all sorts of resonances that sound in us as the roll of Homeric names is quoted.²³

He further underlines the relevance of the intended connotations of the story within the opera to his native audience, writing that 'the great legend which has haunted European imagination for 2,500 years is alive in English minds as anywhere else.'²⁴ This is to say that the familiar story of the Trojan War myth is always already present in European culture, and thus it naturally exists for synthetic consideration within a common interpretative space; it is not a great leap to view it this way rather than as

²¹Arnold Whittall, 'Sir Michael Tippett 1905-1998: Acts of Renewal', *The Musical Times* 139/1861 (1998), 7 (my emphasis).

²²Andrew Porter, 'Michael Tippett's New Opera', *The Musical Times* 1033/1433 (1962), 469.

²³Tippett, 'The Resonance of Troy', 213.

²⁴Tippett, 'The Resonance of Troy', 218.

historical material, or a discrete, temporally removed work of fiction.

2.4.2 Fifth-Century Athenian Tragic Drama as Paratext

King Priam has much in common with many of the surviving examples of fifth-century Athenian tragedy, provoking debate as to whether it might be more aptly described as Ancient Greek tragedy with operatic music, rather than (potentially) modernist opera. Yet there are at least two reasons to doubt this easy judgement: first, the work deviates from the conventions of Athenian tragedy in a few significant respects (aside, of course, from the musical setting); and second, an interrogation of *King Priam* as Athenian tragedy reveals striking commonalities between this genre and central social, ideological and aesthetic tenets of twentieth-century British modernism (as elaborated in the introduction to this thesis) which mandate its consideration as a vital paratextual model for the opera. As will become clear, any attempt to draw a dichotomy between the opera's ancestral theatrical origins in Attic tragedy and its twentieth-century realised existence would be grossly misleading. The spatial analytical model ignores the normative temporal separation which encourages an inordinate focus on differences rather than similarities.

The corpus of fifth-century Athenian tragic drama, which constitutes the vast majority of the repertoire more commonly referred to as 'Greek Tragedy', elaborates a surprisingly small number of mythological narratives, centred around members of the dynasties of Thebes and Atreus, and from the legendary fall of Troy. The theme of human mortality, paradigmatically represented by the symbolic death of royal patriarchs, is a recurrent one, although the point of death itself is seldom portrayed onstage. There is no single tragic narrative to which all extant plays conform. Instead, surviving examples fit into a series of archetypal programmes, any of which might be

combined or subverted within traditional tragic–dramatic practice. Importantly, these programmes were not restricted to constituent occurrences relevant only to the lives of royal and aristocratic families, and an engaged (spatial) Athenian reader from any walk of life could therefore identify with the broad scope of their narrative events and thus construe meaning in the works. However, as Burian is keen to emphasise, these ‘story patterns’ are ‘constructed according to the rules of [their] own inner logic as storytelling rather than the probabilities of everyday life, and [are] capable of generating indefinite numbers of variants.’²⁵ Thus, the dramatist is provided with ample license to abandon adherence to realistic development for dramatic purposes. This represents an encouragement of the deviation of plot and story, rendering these works particularly suitable for spatial analysis.

Traditions of tragic drama are particularly illuminating as the reader engages with Tippett’s composition of the opera, as Clarke asserts: ‘In *King Priam*, tragedy is of the essence. The world of the aesthetic now admits the violent reality of the world.’²⁶ In other words, Tippett’s musical artwork (‘the aesthetic’) simultaneously is imbued with – through the active engagement of the reader in contributing something of their own experience – and transmits – through the interpretative process – meaning (‘the violent reality of the world’, mediated for the individual reader). And what a violent reality it is with which twentieth-century readers of Tippett’s opera are faced: ‘The enormity of history after 1914 is self-evident. Historians put at hundreds of millions the sum of those done to death in wars, political and racial slaughter, deportation, famines, concentration camps. There are no certain figures as to the tens of millions murdered by Leninism, Stalinism, by Maoism, and

²⁵Burian, ‘Myth into *muthos*’, 186.

²⁶Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett*, 37.

their derivatives. Anywhere between thirty and fifty-thousand human beings were incinerated in one night in the fire-raids on Hamburg, Dresden, on Tokyo. Nuclear and bacteriological weapons have been used. Across the planet, torture is endemic and officially sanctioned. Arguably the threshold of our humanity, of that which elevated us above the bestial, has been irreparably lowered. The arts have done their sporadic best to respond.²⁷

Rowena Pollard and David Clarke testify to the vital acknowledgement of two particular philosophical paratexts on Tippett's formulation of the concept for his opera, namely Aristotle's *Poetics* and Goldmann's *Le dieu caché*, particularly the latter's discussion of the interpretation of Ancient Greek tragedy by French dramatist Jean Racine. Of particular relevance to the spatial paradigm in which this thesis is conceived is Goldmann's observation of the anti-teleological narrative of the epitomic tragic figure; he characterizes this with reference to Racine's *Phèdre*, demonstrating the cyclical nature of the work's narrative and thus the tragic protagonist's displacement from a conventional progression through time. Kemp observes the mirroring of this technique in *King Priam*, writing 'Phèdre's last words correspond with her first. *King Priam* ends with the same music with which it began,²⁸ the death of Priam corresponding with the birth of Paris – or of Priam: "So was I once a baby."²⁹

Stephen Halliwell offers the following interpretation of Aristotle's definition of tragedy, as codified in his *Poetics*, which emphasises the participatory nature of

²⁷George Steiner, "'Tragedy", Reconsidered', *New Literary History* 35/1 (2004), 14.

²⁸I presume with this comparison that Kemp is referring to the brass and choral battle sounds and cries first heard in the opera's Prelude, which are overlaid throughout Priam's final conversation with Helen immediately preceding his death.

²⁹Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*, 356.

‘reading’ tragedy, and the crucial feature of deviation between plot and story:

Tragedy is a representation of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude – in language which is garnished in various forms in its different parts – in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative – and through the arousal of pity and fear effecting the *katharsis* of such emotions.³⁰

He also attempts to describe Aristotle’s conception of *katharsis* in more detail, despite the ambiguity with which it is presented in the original text, writing of it as ‘a powerful emotional experience which not only gives our natural feelings of pity and fear full play, but does so in a way which conduces their rightful functioning as part of our understanding of, and response to, events in the human world.’³¹ In this way, individual subjective experience is mediated.

From Racine, Tippetts draws inspiration for his tragic hero, Priam, who, by the end of the story, ‘gripped by and accepting the consequences of some supreme passion or commitment and entirely withdrawn from the normal standards of life, would eventually enter a state of mind which was god-like, absolute.’³² Pollard and Clarke conclude that these two complementary tragic conceptions exist in a mutually facilitative relationship: ‘If the emotional response (and rationale behind it) that Tippetts courts in *King Priam* is overtly Aristotelian, the image through which he releases it, that of tragic man cut off from the rest of the world, owes much to Goldmann’s interpretation of Racine.’³³ This description of the role of these two central paratexts illuminates the process by which we, as spatial readers, are able to understand something of the universal through our engagement with the work: we

³⁰Stephen Halliwell, *The ‘Poetics’ of Aristotle (translation and commentary)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 37.

³¹Halliwell, *The ‘Poetics’ of Aristotle*, 90.

³²Rowena Pollard and David Clarke, ‘Tippetts’s *King Priam* and “The Tragic Vision”’, *Tippetts Studies*, 167.

³³Pollard and Clarke, ‘Tippetts’s *King Priam* and “The Tragic Vision”’, 168.

are able to identify with the archetypal 'tragic man' by participating in his narrative; Tippett's music facilitates this engagement, triggering an emotional response which encapsulates the mediation of the universal for each individual reader.

Tippett himself remarked upon the significance of Aristotle and, particularly, Racine as tragic pedagogues:

Important for *King Priam* is the Racinian concept of tragedy as being absolute. In each of the Racinian tragedies there is always some point when the tragic protagonist accepts, willingly or unwillingly, his or her tragic destiny, and with it the absolute necessity of a certain conduct, which because of its uncompromising absolute quality, must finally end in death.³⁴

The spatial purview deprives this focus on the moment of acceptance of destiny, shifting emphasis onto the scope of the entire narrative, in which the prophetic agency behind the story's events highlights the appropriateness of synchronic perception. Death, rather than being the tragic end, is a condition under which the entire narrative plays out, being always already acknowledged and present.

Pollard and Clarke conclude that in order for absolute tragedy to be achieved the moral revelations finally comprehended by the tragic hero must be communicated to the audience, yet they acknowledge that the transcendental nature of this vision prevents its simple translation into everyday terms; it requires mediation. They commend Tippett's success in overcoming this barrier to our appreciation of Priam's plight, surmising that the audience 'is offered its own moment of transcendence through the dramaturgical portrayal of the tragic man wresting something universal and timeless from the cataclysmic forces of a world and a fate indifferent to humanity. We are moved by the fact that after losing everything in the world itself there remains for Priam a residue in the experience of being human that renders him equal to

³⁴Tippett, 'The Resonance of Troy', 226

the catastrophe about to engulf him.’³⁵ This comment, albeit unwittingly, perfectly encapsulates the process by which the mythological content of the work mediates the universal for the individual reader. Building on the idea of Priam ‘wresting something universal and timeless from the cataclysmic forces of a world and a fate indifferent to humanity’, might we see the eponymous hero as himself a spatial reader? In the process of engaging with the incomprehensible aspects of his own narrative, Priam gives something of himself (arguably something more strenuous and devastating than is offered by the normative spatial reader) and is thereby enabled to understand not only what happens to him, but additionally the previously intangible reasons for which his narrative must play out this way. The opera’s ending confirms our identification with Priam *as an ordinary person* who, like us, is never fully in control of what happens to him;³⁶ it also conforms to Aristotle’s observation of the demand for ‘ethically satisfying endings’ among Athenian audiences to which Tippett pays homage.³⁷

Tippett’s intention that his audience should experience some sort of surge of positive emotion, presumably as a result of the cathartic process, at the sight of Priam’s eventual demise aligns perfectly with the principles of Athenian tragedy;³⁸ as Burian writes, ‘the fundamental struggle is to wrest meaning from suffering’.³⁹ Easterling explains why audiences, perhaps surprisingly, enjoy the tragic genre, describing the mediating function of its mythological materials, which renders the

³⁵Pollard and Clarke, ‘Tippett’s *King Priam* and “The Tragic Vision”’, 184.

³⁶I will return to this idea in the following chapter, section 3.2.2.

³⁷Halliwell, *The ‘Poetics’ of Aristotle*, 6.

³⁸Tippett quoted in Pollard and Clarke, ‘Tippett’s *King Priam* and “The Tragic Vision”’, 168:

‘When audiences will see Priam’s death at the altar as Troy burns, they will feel the old pity and terror and be uplifted by it.’

³⁹Burian, ‘Myth into *muthos*’, 182. This point is also particularly relevant for the following case study on Vaughan Williams’ appropriation of the Job mythology.

audience able to process the ‘violent reality of the world’ with which they are presented in such a way that their engagement is preserved:

But people enjoy tragedy, and at the root of this enjoyment must be awareness of the medium itself, which through the distancing devices of form and convention is able to prevent the terror or despair or horror in the story from threatening the audience’s capacity to remain an audience – or the reader’s willingness to read on.⁴⁰

Burian asserts that Athenian tragedy is ‘not casually or occasionally intertextual, but always and inherently so. Tragic praxis can be seen as a complex manipulation of legendary matter and generic convention, constituting elaborate networks of similarities and differences at every level or organisation’;⁴¹ this description fits *King Priam* equally well, and reinforces the suitability of an analytical investigation of the opera under a spatial framework which examines intertextuality without preoccupation with qualification based on precedence and subsequence. As demonstrated in this chapter, the opera stands in dialogue with a variety of literary, dramatic, musical and philosophical texts, weaving together their characteristic strands to construct a web of interrelations imbued with hermeneutic potential. Tippet’s intertextual references are subtly conveyed, and thus their successful interpretation and comprehension relies upon a certain obligation on the part of the engaged, spatial reader to interact with this work from multiple perspectives.

Under the spatial analytical paradigm, the work’s hermeneutic content and value is to be determined in an important part by reader response, partially predicated on the degree to which each individual reader shares elements of cultural background, outlook, ideals and a sense of aesthetics with the composer. Burian writes:

The fact that such cross-references can remain implicit and still be present for the

⁴⁰P. E. Easterling, ‘Form and performance’, *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, 171.

⁴¹Burian, ‘Myth into *muthos*’, 179.

spectator as interpretative frames suggests that they should be understood not with reference to the author, according to the traditional philological paradigm of source study, but with reference to the audience. Allusions call on a cultural competence that the author counts on spectators to share. Implicit relations among texts can thus be understood as part of a formal design that depends for its full realisation upon an act of recognition – a form of audience complicity in the making of meaning.⁴²

Edith Hall, too, confirms the importance of understanding the contractual interaction between artist and audience for an investigation of any artwork's social significance: 'Any sociological reading of an artwork must address the relationship between its maker and its consumers.'⁴³ How might we characterise the relationship between Tippett and his first audience at Coventry? And what about subsequent audiences since 1962? For the present study, what is important is an acknowledgement of the crucial role of the engaged reader in actively participating in the act of interpretation; there is certainly a great deal of interpretative potential to be explored within Tippett's opera.

2.5 *King Priam's Musical Paratexts*

Porter asserts the primacy of *King Priam's* music with regard to the work's hermeneutic potential, stating that 'the meaning of the opera lies not just in the words: its last, hardest meaning can be communicated only in music.'⁴⁴ Acknowledgement of *King Priam's* musical paratexts and contexts is vitally important for all three levels of the spatial analytical model propounded in this thesis. On the micro-analytical level, individual details of Tippett's musical language and compositional technique may only be properly understood and interpreted with reference to the language and

⁴²Burian, 'Myth into *muthos*', 195.

⁴³Edith Hall, 'The sociology of Athenian tragedy', *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, 95.

⁴⁴Porter, 'Michael Tippett's New Opera', 469.

techniques of other composers whose works stand in dialogue with *King Priam* in its interpretative space. As will be discussed in greater detail hereafter, parallels may productively be drawn between the opera and its musical paratexts on the level of structural shape and formal design, which in conjunction with the more elaborate microanalysis offers much to the engaged spatial reader in terms of the work's mapping of story and plot. Perhaps most obviously, there is much interpretative potential to be realised at the macroanalytical level through consideration of *King Priam* both within Tippett's oeuvre, and more widely in terms of twentieth-century British and European modernism and contemporary compositional theory. It is additionally important to acknowledge Tippett's substantial debt to early English music, particularly to the madrigalists and Henry Purcell, from whom, as Christopher Mark suggests, we might trace a lineage (via Handel's incorporation of Purcellian style) in oratorio composition through to Tippett. Crucially, however, as Mark asserts, Tippett takes this tradition in a new direction, 'resuscitating' it, in works such as *A Child of Our Time* (1939-41), and demonstrating that early English music was both a technical resource pool and the progenitor of an overarching tradition to which the composer could contribute.⁴⁵

2.5.1 Richard Wagner: *Der Ring des Nibelungen*

Richard Wagner is arguably the single most important discernible influence on modernist music-drama of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Wagner and Tippett, separated by over half a century, nevertheless inhabit a common ideological space in which art exists *a priori* in dialectical relation to the condition of

⁴⁵Christopher Mark, 'Tippett and the English traditions', *The Cambridge Companion to Michael Tippett* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 25-9. Unfortunately due to pressures of space I have had to limit discussion of the opera's musical paratexts to other twentieth-century works, but there is much more that could be said on the manifestations of aspects of early English music in the work.

modernity, permitting the mediation of the (universal) human experience through mythological focuses⁴⁶ which bring it into contact with contrasting, and often conflicting, adumbrations of their own immediate present.⁴⁷ Under the spatial analytical framework of this thesis, Wagner's music dramas, particularly *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, stand as important paratextual sources to be drawn into consideration with *King Priam*, circumventing the usual preoccupation with temporal precedence which enforces a language of 'model and response' onto any such discussion. The echoing of Wagner's techniques of musical representation is readily identifiable in *King Priam*, but subtle differences in the grammatical structure of Tippett's musical language reaffirm his penchant for taking inspiration from paratexts and creating not a deferential pastiche, but rather an original, idiosyncratic interpretation, ideally suited to the work or purpose at hand.⁴⁸ For instance, Tippett does not employ leitmotifs in quite the same manner, or to the same extent, as Wagner; however, Thomas S. Grey's description of a resulting 'orchestral accompaniment [that] would be at every moment dramatically relevant, no mere harmonic rhythmic carpet on which singers would strut their melodic finery, as of old' could completely legitimately be applied

⁴⁶Stewart Spencer writes: 'Wagner himself does not seem to have drawn any fundamental distinction between legend and myth, but came to see both as outpourings of the popular spirit. While regularly describing the subjects of his Dresden operas as folk legends, he first uses the term "myth" in 1848 to describe a more archaic, all-embracing manifestation of the spirit of the German people.' Cf. 'The Romantic operas and the turn to myth', *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 71.

⁴⁷J.P.E. Harper-Scott refers to an area of common ground between Wagner and present-day audiences – Cf. 'Wagner, Sex and Capitalism', *The Wagner Journal* 5/2 (2011), 53.

⁴⁸Several studies demonstrate Wagner's willingness to move away from the original materials he co-opts in order to achieve radical political and artistic ends. Cf. J.P.E. Harper-Scott, 'Medieval Romance and Musical Narrative in Wagner's *Ring*', *19th-Century Music* 32/3 (2009), 211-34; Dieter Borchmeyer, *Richard Wagner: Theory and Theatre* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Deryck Cooke, *I Saw the World End: A Study of Wagner's "Ring"* (London: OUP, 1979).

to *King Priam*.⁴⁹ Arguably, the opera stands as testament to Tippett's success in negotiating Wagner's challenge of 'devis[ing] some kind of compromise between a crude indexical underscoring of characters and stage properties, on the one hand, and the need to create effective musical momentum and structure, on the other – a compelling musical rhetoric to supplant the conventional designs of "absolute" operatic melody Wagner had chosen to dismiss.'⁵⁰ In addition to aspects of musical and dramatic style, it is interesting to consider Tippett's dialogue with Wagner's artistic philosophy, particularly concerning the privileging of the musical over the literary or visual elements of music-drama, and the potential function of artworks as vessels for the communication of social critique.

Music-drama ought, in Wagner's conception, to consist of three core elements: music, words, and theatrics. Of these, words (he of course wrote all his own libretti) were considered the least important, and thus the common analogy of a marriage between text and notes is misleading; they exist in an interactive, but ultimately unequal relationship in which the libretto is always subservient to the music, 'it exists to be musicalized, and must therefore be in need of musicalization before it can become what it is for.'⁵¹ Wagner's prioritisation of the musical and theatrical events of a musico-dramatic work has a discernible echo in *King Priam*: the close intertwining of music and stage spectacle (codified in stage directions, descriptions of the sets and costumes, and Tippett's anecdotal reminiscences about the production at the Coventry premiere and first run at Covent Garden) mirrors Wagner's desire to directly depict his characters in their phenomenal world through the combination of music and

⁴⁹Thomas S. Grey, 'Leitmotif, temporality and musical design in the *Ring*', *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, 88.

⁵⁰Grey, 'Leitmotif, temporality and musical design in the *Ring*', 88.

⁵¹Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 2000), 9.

stage display at a fundamental sensory level.

Wagner himself drew great inspiration from fifth-century Athenian tragedy, and there are several immediate parallels to be observed in the *Ring* tetralogy. The concept of a four-part series of related dramas is mirrored in the performance tradition of sets of three tragic plays followed by a more light-hearted *satyr*, designed to alleviate the emotional trauma of the preceding works. In addition, the prominent themes of guilt, a familial curse, and inescapable fate are immediately evident in the *Ring*'s narrative design. Barry Millington even suggests that 'Wagner's development of the leitmotif principle itself may have been influenced by Aeschylus's use of recurrent imagery.'⁵²

It is possible to trace a broadly similar trajectory in the political paths of Wagner and Tippett. Both were dedicated advocates of left-wing revolutionary politics during their youth, but became disillusioned, and turned away from political priorities to develop their own, more personal world-views later in life. Magee writes that Wagner's 'significant movement was not from left to right, but from politics to metaphysics';⁵³ a similar shift in focus is evident in Tippett's thinking around the time of *King Priam*'s conception.⁵⁴ According to Deryck Cooke, Wagner initially created *Der Ring des Nibelungen* as both an exposition of what he identified as the fundamental wrongs of contemporary society, and an idealised projection of an alternative reality in which these wrongs are eradicated. Mythology is central to this vision, but, crucially, music is the only viable medium through which it can be communicated.⁵⁵ This description immediately resonates with the modernist

⁵²Barry Millington, 'Der Ring des Nibelungen: conception and interpretation', *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, 74-5.

⁵³Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 3.

⁵⁴Kemp discusses this turning point in Tippett's personal and compositional philosophy in some length in *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*, 322-332.

⁵⁵Cf. Cooke, *I Saw the World End*, 12.

post-war reconception of the pastoral mode as depicting a preferable alternative to an unpleasant reality, rather than a nostalgic reminiscence of a better past; the spatial perspective permits us to examine this concordance without being troubled by the temporal *non sequitur* of Wagner's pre-dating of this postwar aesthetic. The final tetralogy achieves a related, but ultimately more grounded result: with *Das Rheingold* Wagner 'conceived the essence of the world itself and *recognised its nothingness*',⁵⁶ and what follows in *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and finally *Götterdämmerung* elaborates Wagner's understanding of our real world with all its concomitant challenges, rather than a utopian fantasy of the kind commonly found in mythological narratives. In the process of composing the tetralogy, Wagner actively engaged with the mythological materials himself as a spatial reader, and in this interpretative space experienced the dialogic mediation of his personal experience with the universal challenges of human experience; the result is a gargantuan artwork which functions as a crucial paratext for the plethora of dramatic responses to the condition of modernity in the twentieth century and beyond.

2.5.2 Benjamin Britten: *War Requiem*

While the spatial analytical framework of this thesis deprivileges qualification in terms of chronology, the temporal proximity of *King Priam*'s premiere at Coventry to that of Britten's *War Requiem* presents an obvious opportunity for a comparison of the two works, since they already inhabit the same interpretative space simply by virtue of the context of their creation. However, such a study has not been pursued in any depth in scholarship to date. Comparative studies of the two composers do exist, with Whittall's *The Music of Britten and Tippett* being the best example, yet even

⁵⁶Cooke, *I Saw the World End*, 247 (my emphasis).

here scant assessment is made of the significant closeness of their premieres, and other connections that Whittall makes between the two works are, though valid, quite fleeting. Derrick Puffett confirms that ‘the history of Tippett’s reputation is inextricably bound up with that of Britten’, and uses the neat synchronicity of premieres of their works in May 1962 to construct an inversely proportionate relationship between the two men in terms of their professional success and public recognition.⁵⁷ *King Priam*, in contrast to the *War Requiem*, did not meet with a particularly warm reception at its premiere, but has since enjoyed considerable popularity. The Coventry festival was, for Puffett, a turning point for each composer: despite the immediate success of Britten’s *War Requiem* – Cooke writes that ‘it is difficult to call to mind any other major twentieth-century work which met with such instantaneous and unanimously high praise from almost all sectors of the media’⁵⁸ – the work’s premiere marked the start of a more general decline in the composer’s career, while conversely, *King Priam* was the spark which ignited Tippett’s rise to public acclaim. He writes: ‘1962 was [...] a decisive year in the lives of both artists, one which marked a parting of the ways [...] Tippett went on to flourish in critical esteem. Britten, on the other hand, entered a period, lasting until his death, in which he was looked on rather less kindly by the critics.’⁵⁹ His hypothesis is supported by a similar observation from American music critic John Ardoin, who writes that in 1965 England had ‘only begun to look seriously behind the long shadow cast by Britten and to realise what an original and tough composer it had in Tippett, especially in

⁵⁷Derrick Puffett, ‘Tippett and the Retreat from Mythology’, *The Musical Times* 136/1823 (1995), 6.

⁵⁸Cooke, *Britten: War Requiem*, 78.

⁵⁹Puffett, ‘Tippett and the Retreat from Mythology’, 9.

the realm of opera.’⁶⁰

The great interpretative potential in each of these two works becomes apparent from their detailed comparison under the spatial analytical framework, which conceives of them as each other’s paratexts on all three of its constituent levels. Their suitability for this type of investigation, which is by no means determined only by the chronological coincidence of their premieres, is predicated on their common focus on conflict, their composition for voices and instruments, and, most significantly, by the shared capacity of the two composers to use psychological drama as a form of social commentary. One thinks, for instance, of *Peter Grimes*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Gloriana*, *A Child of Our Time*, and *The Knot Garden*. Furthermore, as David Beard observes, ‘a sense of the past was crucial to both Britten and Tippett’;⁶¹ both *King Priam* and the *War Requiem* draw from historic literary sources, the former from Homer’s epic, and the latter from the First World War poetry of Wilfred Owen and the Latin Requiem mass. The spatial framework of the present investigation, while affording no attention to the chronological precedence of these important paratexts, mandates their crucial consideration as models with which the works in question stand in dialogue, and by definition shifts the focus away from the idea of precedent and response and onto the contemporary relevance of the paratextual sources. There is certainly something to be gained from an examination and comparison of the ways in which these texts and their corresponding musical settings may be interpreted by such engaged spatial readers as contemporary audiences, analysts and social historians, particularly given Tippett’s implicit indication of their contrasting natures as he

⁶⁰John Ardoin, ‘Tippett in America’, *Opera Quarterly* 4/4 (1986), 1.

⁶¹David Beard, ‘Review’, [Rev. of Philip Rupprecht, *Britten’s Musical Language*; Clarke *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett*; and David Metzger *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music*], *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 129/2 (2004), 305.

recounts how his opera's premiere was 'juxtaposed' with that of the requiem. This, however, is outside the scope of the present study and thus what is presented here is merely an introductory summary of some areas ripe for a more detailed investigation.

Both works were commissioned for the 1962 Coventry Festival, organised in celebration of the rebuilding of the city's obliterated cathedral around the original building's extant ruins. What was left of the old cathedral still stands today, rendering those who visit the site acutely aware of the legacy of the Second World War and reminding them of its unimaginable horrors, as old and new are drawn together and overlaid in a single physical and interpretative space. Britten's *War Requiem* fulfils a similar function; the Latin mass and war poetry mediate one other through their musical expression, so that while some refuge is offered in the sanctity of the Requiem mass, the audience is made painfully aware of the need to retain the lessons of the past, in order to prevent events from repeating themselves in the future. The urgency of this message is highlighted by the fact that Owen's poetry was written during the *First* World War, and yet even after the experience of that conflict, the *Second* World War still happened. The *War Requiem*'s spatial reader will necessarily draw this subsequent conflict into their engagement with the work. Indeed, Cooke attributes the chequered reception history of the work – starkly contrasting with its initial reception – to its emotive power: 'The problem with later reception concerns a very real inability on the part of listeners and critics alike to divorce the music of the War Requiem from its powerful subject-matter: how can the quality of the score be judged objectively when the gut reaction to its message is often one of emotional turmoil?'⁶² I would contend, however, that the problem with the work's reception arises from the desire

⁶²Cooke, *Britten: War Requiem*, 85.

on the part of its listeners and critics to treat the music as separable from its didactic content. Britten's *War Requiem* is an epitomic social artwork, and must be interpreted as such – to attempt an 'objective' analysis of the notes of the score is not only pointless in the context in which this work was conceived, but also disrespectful, given Britten's well-documented intentions in its creation. The emotional turmoil which listeners and critics have objected to on the grounds that it precludes the proper analysis of the music is precisely the point of the music – this is what it was always meant to convey. It is completely plausible to read in *King Priam* a similar message, albeit delivered through a different approach. The opera's narrative, based around a distant, mythological conflict, encourages the engaged spatial reader to reflect upon their own society and their own experience of conflict, without the emotional trauma inevitably caused by direct reference to twentieth-century conflicts; this is precisely the *mediating function* of mythology.

2.5.3 Igor Stravinsky: *Agon*, *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, and *Oedipus Rex*

Another composer whose works stand as important paratexts to *King Priam* is Igor Stravinsky. His pervading legacy for later musical composition, including that of Michael Tippett, forms the central focus of Jonathan Cross's 1998 study. Cross asserts that Stravinsky's abiding bequest to future musical composition was the creation of an experimental climate which made later works in similarly unprecedented veins possible, both in terms of technical guidance and an explicit aesthetic rationale for a particular compositional philosophy. Cross seems to suggest that Tippett certainly looked to his Russian contemporary for the latter, but not the former,⁶³ although as

⁶³Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 64.

the following, albeit brief, analysis will demonstrate, there is much interpretative insight to be gained through the identification of points of confluence between Tippett's musical language in *King Priam*, and Stravinsky's technical procedures and techniques.

Stravinsky's ballet *Agon* (1953-7), composed over a gestation period almost identical in length to that of *King Priam*, stands as a direct contemporary paratext for Tippett's opera. Combinations of contrasting timbres, textures and, most strikingly, scale types (diatonic, chromatic and octatonic), are used to embody different realms of existence, particularly demarcating the void between human and phantasmagorical worlds, and we might observe that *King Priam* mirrors this illustrative technique, as evidenced pre-eminently by the simple dichotomy between the string-dominated soundworld of the female, domestic characters, and the rather more brash wind and brass sounds emblematic of their militant male counterparts.⁶⁴ Tippett describes *Agon* as having been 'germane to my current compositional enterprise, *King Priam*.' Indeed, he credits Stravinsky's instrumental writing with inspiring the new style of orchestration deployed in the opera, which he characterises specifically as including the following technique: 'treating solo instruments as equals both within the ensemble and against the voices on stage.'⁶⁵

The success of Tippett's harnessing of this compositional directive is evident throughout the opera; one particular point of illustration is the male ensemble in Act II, Scene 3. In keeping with the rest of the work, particular combinations of instruments are used to accompany and further elucidate the expression of individual characters, but as the following short analytical account will show, each individual

⁶⁴More detailed discussion of the opera's instrumental gendering will follow in Ch. 3, section 3.4.3.

⁶⁵Tippett, *Those Twentieth-Century Blues*, 226.

instrument is brought to the foreground, and at various points, individual instruments interact through dialogic exchange with the voices, occasionally taking over as the primary mode of expression. In this way, they are treated as ‘equals both within the ensemble and against the voices on stage.’

The scene opens (at bar 511) with bassoon, contrabassoon, fourth horn and piano, instruments strongly identified with Priam, and, simultaneously, he takes his place onstage, beside the walls of Troy. Tippett sets the scene with fortissimo percussive strikes, alternating with ominous chromatic enlarged turn figures in the bassoon and contrabassoon (figure 2.1).

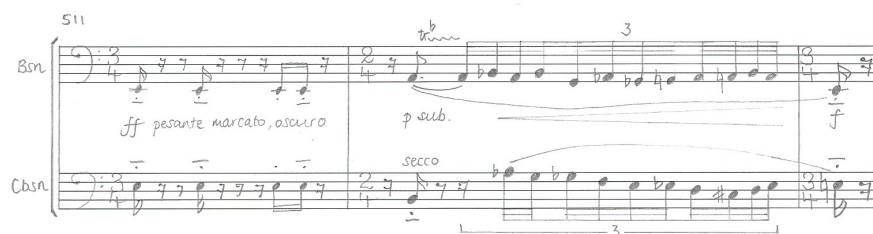


Figure 2.1: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 3 – bars 511-3

These are followed by a dotted figure which hammers out a cluster chord consisting of E, F \sharp , G and B, and then an altered rhythmic echo of this dotted figure in the timpani, which heralds Hermes' arrival onstage (figure 2.2). Hermes' lines, declaimed as a generic messenger character, 'A hero in Achilles' armour, perhaps Patroclus, rushed headlong from the ships, driving all before him,' are accompanied only by the timpani spanning a perfect fifth between C \sharp and F \sharp , and the interaction between instrument and voice here is definitively dialogic.

Figure 2.2: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 3 – bars 515-6

The majority of the timpani entries, which each end with a trill on the upper note, are played in between Hermes' vocal entries (figure 2.3). In bar 521, directly following Hermes' last words, Priam's more laboured, desolate response begins, 'So had I feared. It is Patroclus. He alone could touch Achilles' heart.' This is accompanied by the bassoon, contrabassoon and third and fourth horns, which play sustained chords of E \flat , B \flat , and D \flat ; G, A \flat , C, and F; and E \flat , F, B, and A. Following the end of Priam's line, the piano, bassoon, contrabassoon and fourth horn repeat their dotted figure, this time on a chord of E, G, A and B \flat , before the timpani echo, now on A and E announces Hermes' next line: 'But Hector and Paris have rallied all your sons, and Hector fights Patroclus man to man', which is accompanied in dialogic fashion as before.

Handwritten musical score for *King Priam*, Act II, Scene 3, bars 517-20. The score is written for Timpani (Timp.) and Hermes. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with trills and dynamic markings. The lyrics are in French and English.

Bar 517: Timp. (dim.) (p) pp. Hermes: A he-ro in A-chil-lés ar-mour, per-haps Pa-tro-clus,

Bar 519: Timp. p mp. Hermes: rushed head-long from the ships, dn-ving all-be-fore him.

Figure 2.3: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 3 – bars 517-20

Now, at bar 533, Paris enters, and the instrumentation abruptly changes to oboe, cor anglais, and clarinet, playing a more unsettled homophonic motif which moves between cluster chords of A, D, and G#; and B, E and A, while the first horn (tied timbrally to Priam) plays a sweeping arpeggiated figure which moves down through an octave and a half before instantly rising back through a major seventh (figure 2.4). The oboe, cor anglais and clarinet continue over Paris' first line, 'Father, have you heard the news?', while the horn stops before Paris starts singing, and then recommences as his line finishes, playing a solo altered version of the arpeggiated sweeping figure over Priam's reply, 'That Hector fights Patroclus, while you run back!' The oboe, cor anglais and clarinet then repeat their motif in an elongated and slightly rhythmically altered version (bars 539-546), as Paris sings 'O, but Hector has already killed him. Stripped the body. You shall see Hector come resplendent in Achilles' armour.'



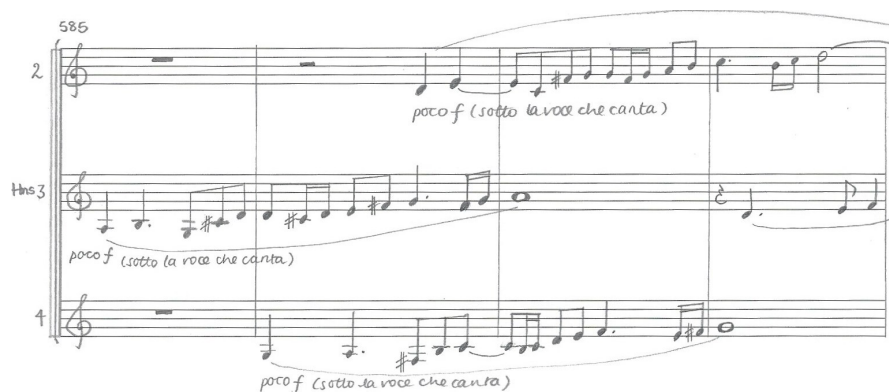
Figure 2.5: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 3 – bars 547-9

The following trio begins with an exposition from Hector of the preceding battle action, ‘All Trojans, all fought bravely and together till Achilles sent Patroclus into battle’, accompanied by the trombones and tuba, which play descending scalar patterns underneath Hector’s bright, triumphal melody (figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 3 – bars 549-52

The herald group then repeat a melodically-altered version of their fanfare figure, articulating the start of Hector's announcement of his victory, and the trombones and tuba then accompany the vocal line as before, 'But with Apollo's help I, Hector, killed Achilles' comrade and wear Achilles' armour now as mine.' At bar 566, the oboe, cor anglais, Eb, Bb and bass clarinets and bassoon anticipate Hector's forthcoming request to Priam and Paris, playing a dotted ascending and descending figure which stops and starts periodically in order to leave silence under the prominent, masculine, parts of Hector's next lines (given in italics here): '*Father Priam and you too brother Paris, before I go to greet Andromache and kiss my son, let us give thanks to Zeus.*' The final phrase here ascends to the highest part of the tessitura thus far, creating a fortissimo climax over 'Zeus' at bar 579. In this bar, Tippett dovetails the end of Hector's request to his father and brother with the instrumental prelude to the supplication, which features staggered entries from pairs of instruments: first the contrabassoon and tuba (Priam and Hector); next the first and third horns (Priam and Paris); then the first and second trombones (Hector); and finally the first and second trumpets (Hector).

The supplication itself is a rhythmic canon between Hector – doubled by the third horn, Priam – doubled by the fourth horn, and Paris – doubled by the second horn, with a bar between the first and second entries, and half a bar between the second and third entries: 'O Zeus, King of all gods and goddesses. High on Olympus. You have bowed your head for death to the Greek hero, to Patroclus. Glorious victory to Hector and to Troy.' The stylised, decorated and elongated phrases of the canon (figure 2.7) are composed against a completely contrasting block of material which is played in rhythmic unison by the flute, piccolo, oboe, cor anglais, and Eb and Bb clarinets.

Figure 2.7: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 3 – bars 585-8

This series of *fp* trilled flourishes continues in the backdrop, articulating the top of the tessitura insistently over the lower male voices and horns (figure 2.8).

Figure 2.8: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 3 – bars 584-7

At bar 602 the first section of the supplication ends on ‘Troy’, and all four trumpets play a four-bar homophonic fanfare (figure 2.9), which only breaks rhythmic unison in the penultimate bar where the fourth horn’s notes are placed off-beat to create

syncopated emphasis of the climax to the phrase.



Figure 2.9: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 3 – bars 602-5

The second section of the supplication starts halfway through bar 605, ‘And O Apollo, who fights for us, When the goddesses and gods besiege Zeus’ ear, speak first and loudest to ensure the Olympian head bows once again to uphold our walls, and twice to destroy their ships.’ During this section, the established vocal/instrumental pairings and the contrast of the voices-horns group and the woodwind ensemble are retained. At bar 620, the bassoon joins Hector and the third horn, and the piano enters with a series of chromatic trills as Achilles’ appears onstage. From here the music builds to a climax at bar 621, in which the start of Achilles’ war-cry is dovetailed over ‘ships’.

Agon is characterised by Cross as ‘a kind of abstract Greek drama’;⁶⁶ indeed the work’s title, loosely translated, means a game or contest – an apposite summation, too, of the plight of Tippett’s characters against fate and the will of the gods and more

⁶⁶Jonathan Cross, ‘Stravinsky’s Theatres’, *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 145.

generally of the characters of Greek tragic drama or any non-fifth-century works in dialogue with that genre. As a paratext for *King Priam*, *Agon* exhibits a similar distancing technique: the ballet presents an idiosyncratic image of Attic culture through music which bears no resemblance either to that of Ancient Greece or to more recent identifiably stylised representations of that soundworld; in fact, Stravinsky deliberately writes in a musical language totally non-reminiscent of the origins of his work's generating thesis. *King Priam* follows this example: the Greek epic at the heart of its narrative is depicted, enhanced and challenged musically through the creation of a soundworld which, while dramatically complementary to the opera's narrative, does not lock the opera to any particular geographical or temporal location, rendering it particularly amenable to spatial form analysis.

Where earlier works sat more comfortably within a traditional tonal idiom, Whittall has noted that *King Priam* espouses a more Schoenbergian 'extended tonality', characterised by a continually lacking sense of a definite key centre. The opera may be described as Tippett's first significant large-scale experimentation with block-form, based on the technique developed by Stravinsky in his *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*.⁶⁷ Indeed, Kemp describes the features of the formal template of the opera with phrases that could have been lifted from a commentary on Stravinsky's *Symphonies*:

The organisation of Tippett's gestural language postulates juxtapositions and superpositions, as opposed to developments and gradual transformations appropriate to material that invites rather than resists change [...] Tippett proceeds by sudden contrasts, and by the rearrangement of the components of such contrasts. His music is 'non-developmental' in the sense that it contains no transitions, or at least seems to have none. Nevertheless it still contains the stuff of dynamic movement for its components generate their own interior tensions which then find release in switches

⁶⁷I will go on to describe this precedent in greater detail later in the chapter.

to other components.⁶⁸

Mark traces Tippett's move to block structure in *King Priam* back to madrigal form, writing that 'What [Tippett] perceives [in his observation of madrigal form in Purcell] is close to the mosaic form that emerges with such dramatic forcefulness in *King Priam*. In that work and many others that followed, Tippett maximizes the block-like nature of the music by emphasizing the non-connectedness between the different materials – in particular, he ensures that the blocks are non-concluding, eschewing any sense of transition.'⁶⁹ From this brief summary, the suitability of the spatial analytical model is already clear. Compared with Tippett's earlier dense, interwoven textures featuring complex counterpoint between multiple vocal and instrumental lines, the opera's musical idiom emerges as sparse, with certain sonorities exposed and simplified, though individual lines are themselves extremely technically difficult. The orchestra is often divided by instrumental grouping, only rarely bringing different tone colours together except in very specific, defined chamber groups, such as the combination of solo oboe, piano, harp, and strings in Paris' Act I, Scene 2 aria 'They have taken my bull'.



Figure 2.10: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 2 – bars 513-5

Paris' first aria in the opera opens (bar 510) with shimmering divisi strings (violins *a5*, violas and cellos *a4*, and double basses *a2*) playing a cluster chord

⁶⁸Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*, 337.

⁶⁹Mark, 'Tippett and the English traditions', 40.

containing B \flat , D \flat , G, A \flat , E \flat , D, and F which spans four and a half octaves. This is prolonged over three bars with fluttering and rapidly oscillating broken chord decoration. Paris appears out of this ethereal image, his arrival signalled (figure 2.10) by the solo oboe with which his character is represented throughout the work, accompanied by the divisi violas (later used to represent Helen), which play an ascending figure (figure 2.11) whose harmonic rhythm increases dramatically in the second bar, adding to the highly evocative soundworld already created.



Figure 2.11: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 2 – bars 513-4

Paris' vocal phrases, 'They have taken my bull/He was my best friend/I have no playmates' alternate with the solo oboe and violas phrases, which sound with Hector's responses, 'We want it for the games/You are friends with a bull!' in dialogic fashion until bar 522, when they sound together as Paris sings 'I live alone with my shepherd father.' From this point, the solo oboe continues without pause as Hector asks 'Did he give you the bull and teach you that skill in riding?' accompanied by the violas, and Paris replies 'I've always ridden so. The bull is mine because I ride him. On his

back one day I'll ride out into the wide world.' After one beat's rest, the oboe solo continues further, as Hector, accompanied by the violas, asks 'Where will you go?', and Paris responds 'I shall go first to Troy, to take my place with the young heroes.'

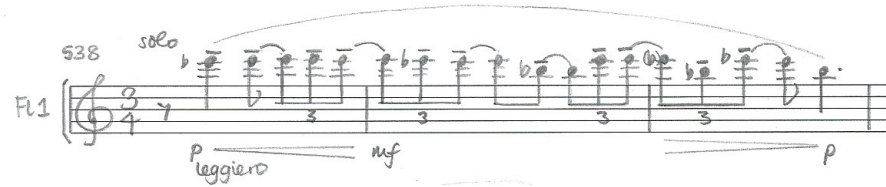


Figure 2.12: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 2 – bars 538-40

Figure 2.13: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 2 – bars 538-40

As this line ends, four soli violins and solo flute enter, playing modified versions of the viola and oboe phrases (bars 538-40 – figures 2.12 and 2.13). This subtle change of timbre and raising of pitch creates a sense of nervous energy and excitement, preparing Hector's next line, 'To do that you must learn to drive horses and chariots; but I could teach you.' Following this, an exchange of brief lines takes place between Paris and Hector accompanied only by the solo oboe, building anticipation for the

moment in which the characters' identities will be revealed: 'Who are you then?/I am from Troy./Are you a young hero?/O yes.' At bars 549-50, the violins reprise their ascending phrase under the climax (in terms of pitch) of the solo oboe line. Following this Paris and Hector exchange the following, completely unaccompanied: 'Can I go back with you to Troy?/That depends on your father.' In excitement, Paris responds 'He will let me go, I know, if you'll take me' accompanied by a flurrying broken chord phrase in the solo oboe (figure 2.14).

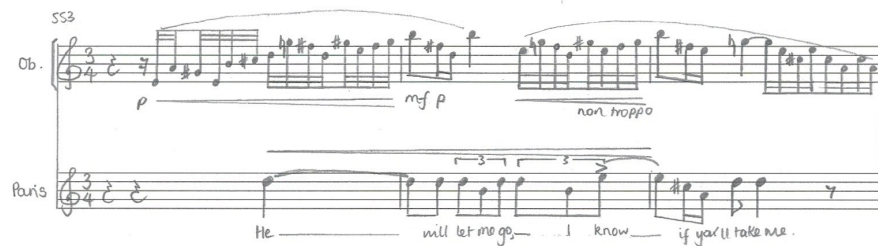
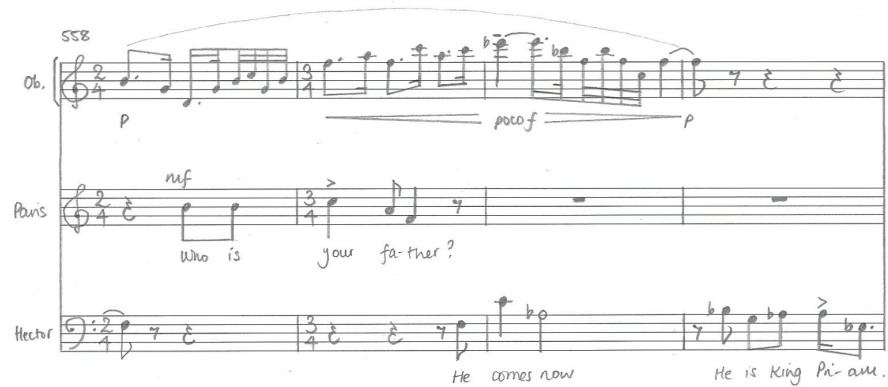
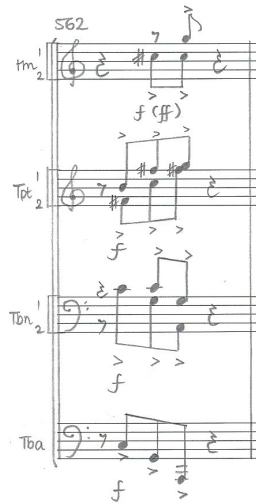


Figure 2.14: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 2 – bars 553-5

Hector follows this with another unaccompanied statement, 'Then we must ask my father.' This section of the scene is drawn to a dramatic climax with a final phrase from the solo oboe, which first descends and then hurries back up through almost the whole range of the instrument, with a concomitant crescendo, as Paris expectantly asks 'Who is your father?' (figure 2.15). Hector replies, 'He comes now', under a high Eb on solo flute, sounded *forte* initially and then dying away to *piano*, and then continues, completely unaccompanied for full dramatic effect in the following bar 'He is King Priam.' Priam's entry is immediately confirmed aurally by a brief interjection from the piccolos, clarinet, first and second horns, trumpets and trombones, tuba and xylophone (figure 2.16). Immediately following this, the harp, piano and strings reprise the shimmer from the opening of the scene, followed by the solo oboe and viola figures which originally signalled Paris' entry (figures 2.10 and 2.11).

Figure 2.15: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 2 – bars 558-61Figure 2.16: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 2 – bar 562

This time, they are followed by Hector's unaccompanied sung explanation to Priam of what he has learnt, and his supplication for Paris to be allowed to go to Troy: 'Father, he's a shepherd boy. He wants to come to Troy to be a young hero. I should like to have him with us.' Priam's weighty, authoritative response is accompanied by his already familiar bassoon and contrabassoon, constituting a fall in tessitura and a noticeable change in the character of the music: 'Beloved Hector, if you want him and Troy has need of heroes. But does his father wish it? He's not of age to go without

consent.’ (figure 2.17).

571

Bsn
p dolce

Obsn
p dolce

Priam
Be-lor-ed Her-for, if you want him and Troy has need of he-roes. But does his
fa-ther wish it?

Figure 2.17: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 2 – bars 571-4

Paris excitedly replies, accompanied by an even more rapidly oscillating solo oboe phrase, and later the divisi violins playing their ascending motif, ‘O my father will consent, That’s what he promised.’ Priam continues (ironically), accompanied again by bassoon and contrabassoon, ‘Do you really choose to leave your father and this country life? To live in barracks and be trained in fighting?’ Paris replies, with the solo oboe, ‘I love my father and my home. But I want adventure. I choose the life in Troy. For I belong to Troy, I know.’ As he sings these final two phrases, the violas reprise their ascending phrase and the oboe line rises again, leading to a climax after his final words with a high triplet figure in the solo flute, and rapidly ascending scalar figures in the divisi violins. Following this, Priam asks, unaccompanied, ‘What

is your name, boy?', and after two full beats rest, Paris gives his fateful response. The intended reaction from the audience is illustrated with a sharp, *fortissimo* strike, marked *secco*, in the oboes, clarinets, horns, trumpets, trombones, tuba and timpani.

The creation of characters belonging to a mixture of different social strata is one example of the juxtaposition of 'high' and 'low' elements characteristic of what Peter Brook designates 'Rough Theatre'. Cross identifies a myriad of such examples within Stravinsky's 'rough theatre' works, establishing a model with which *King Priam* might be seen to be in dialogue. Tippett's own libretto, widely criticised by contemporary and later scholars and critics, might represent 'low' art, in relation to the 'high' musical genre of opera, and his deployment of instantly recognisable, conventional musical figures – such as the antiphonal hunting calls between the orchestral and offstage horns in Act I, Scene 2, or the recurrent fanfares throughout the work, for instance – appears 'low' when contrasted with the atonal gestures and stylised chromaticism with which they are frequently juxtaposed. The concept of 'roughness' is closely intertwined with the ideas of ritual and myth: they are subsumed under the umbrella of primitivism. In both the ancient Greek and modern worlds, however, this primitivism must be subjected to reason: the Dionysian aspects (the sensual, spontaneous, irrational and emotional) are subjugated by Apollonian principles (of rationality, order, reasoning and self-discipline). Nietzsche argues that without Apollonian constraints to provide 'precision and lucidity', we are exposed only to the Dionysian elements, which constitute 'the horror or absurdity of existence.'⁷⁰ In this way, rough drama might be said to be self-mediating; in a representation of

⁷⁰Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 26.

the interpretative process that we undergo as spatial readers of works incorporating mythological materials, the juxtaposition of ‘low’ and ‘high’ demonstrates the process of rendering more familiar that which we cannot know or understand through the application of that which *we know* that we know and understand.

2.6 Mapping ‘Story’ and ‘Plot’

We have now established the vital presence of *King Priam*’s literary, dramatic, and musical paratexts, and started to problematize aspects of the opera’s formal design, aesthetic shape, and narrative structure; opening up the interpretative space in which the work will be subjected to a more thorough and revealing interrogation in the following chapter. All that is required now is to delineate Tippett’s narrative trajectory by mapping the rupture between the opera’s story and plot. This discussion will necessarily focus on instances of narrative cross-referentiality, however, we must remember that this is only one level of the spatial analytical model, and the insights drawn on here are intended to preface a more nuanced and complex discussion in the following chapter.

Rough theatre often features a lack of continuity, and Tippett’s block form in *King Priam* – arguably modelled on Stravinsky’s *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and *Oedipus Rex*⁷¹ – certainly serves to disrupt the teleological progression of the opera’s narrative; one might describe the overall effect as a ‘collage’ of musical material, rather than a continuous stream of musical material which flows throughout the work carrying the narrative with it. Analysis on the second level of the spatial framework demonstrates that Tippett creates and maintains a sense of unity and

⁷¹For a detailed investigation of Stravinsky’s block forms, see Chapter 2 ‘Block Forms’ in Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*.

congruence on a global level within the work, despite the displacement of plot from story, by recognisably demarcating his musical blocks, and creating strong identifications between particular musical gestures and characters or narrative threads which recur over the course of the work as a whole.

In addition to the internal cross-references discussed elsewhere in this chapter, the following selective mapping of story and plot in the opera highlights a number of techniques employed by Tippett to tie the narrative together and maintain a sense of cohesion within the work as a whole.⁷² The timeline of the story is already disrupted by the element of prophecy; from the moment the Old Man translates the meaning of Hecuba's dream in the first scene, the reader is aware that Paris is fated to cause his father's death and the downfall of Troy. However, in the first deviation of plot from story, the opera's prelude creates a very strong sense of the tragic outcome of the narrative, creating an elaborate image of conflict with fanfare figures, percussive interjections, and offstage chorus cries. More specifically, two individual recurring motifs make their first appearance in the prelude, tying the opening of the work to Priam's anguish as he must decide again whether to allow Paris to return to Troy as a boy; and to his final conversation, with Helen, at the very end of the work.

From the spatial perspective, when we hear these trumpet motifs (figures 2.18 and 2.19) in the Prelude, they are already imbued with the notion of Priam's conflicted self-identity, and by association, the bifurcation of the milieu in which the stage action occurs into the public and private spheres, the fact that Paris survives his childhood, and thus brings destruction to Priam and Troy, and the devastating

⁷²This survey is deliberately limited to thematic/motivic allusions; though there is much fertile ground for further investigation in terms of harmonic and tonal connections which lies beyond the scope of the present study. Cf. pitch-set analyses by Clarke and Whittall, for example.

impotence experienced by subordinate characters.

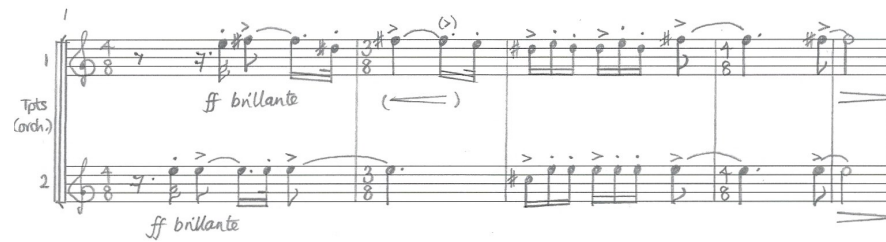


Figure 2.18: *King Priam* Act I, Prelude – bars 1-5



Figure 2.19: *King Priam* Act I, Prelude – bars 27-33

Thus even before there is any mention of the prophecy surrounding Paris' birth, the tragic conclusion of the narrative and a number of its most important themes are already known. When Priam sings 'Where are the shadows from the past who haunt my dreams, who knows (*sic*) there was a real dream of Hecuba's that cannot be undreamt?' after discovering Paris' identity during the hunt, the foreboding image of battle created in the Prelude, as well as the sense of general devastation, and Priam's multiple dethronings (as a King, as a father, as a man, as an agent of his own fate), are already in the reader's mind as Priam comes to face his impossible choice once more: the prophecy is inescapable. And when Priam receives Helen at the altar in the

opera's final scene, against the chaotic backdrop of the ongoing battle, the narrative's conclusion is tied inextricably to its opening, as Priam is to Helen through their intimate connections with Paris and his prophecy.

102

Hrs

1

2

f sub. poco marcato, pesante

mp

Pno

doubled an octave higher

f sub. poco marcato, pesante

doubled an octave lower

mp

8

105

p

mp

p

mp

Figure 2.20: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 1 – bars 102-8

Priam's first entry, at bar 102, is signalled by a grand homophonic gesture played by horns and piano (figure 2.20). Here it is measured and stately, entirely becoming of a King in a time of prosperity, and yet aurally, under the spatial purview, it is tied to the first scene of Act II, where Priam scolds Paris and Hector for their

bickering, and encourages them to return to the battle together; to its slight variant later in that scene where Priam confides his displeasure at Paris' conduct, and fear of its consequences; to the opening of the opera's final scene, as a somewhat disfigured Priam enters to receive news of Paris' vengeance on Achilles; and to its final, again varied, appearance later in that scene following the immortal words 'You are not the founding sort', as Priam vows that he will not abandon his city to go with Paris to found a new Troy elsewhere.⁷³ Thus, from the spatial perspective, this initial rendering of Priam's theme is inflected with aspects of his character as a father *and* as a King; with the sense that he is a public figure, in a position of responsibility, and with a reputation to uphold; but also with an acknowledgement of his potential weakness – he is loyal and steadfast, yet by no means unassailable – he is, after all, only human. When Priam sings 'Stop wrangling Sons!' in Act II, we are fully aware that he reprimands Paris and Hector not simply as a patriarch, but as a ruler, very much in the public eye. Not only that, but since this moment is aurally tied to the moments directly preceding Priam's impossible choice in the first Act, we must acknowledge the implication, under this spatial conception, that Priam is ultimately responsible for Paris' actions, by virtue of having let him return to Troy – and yet simultaneously we are aware that the ramifications of Paris' actions are unavoidable, and will result in Priam's death and the city's devastation. In Act III, Scene 4, then, Priam's weakened state appears all the more poignant and striking in direct comparison with his original appearance onstage. As Paris comes to bring him the news of Achilles' death, it is

⁷³In the mid-twentieth century context of the work's composition, this line (I use the description of 'immortal words' here to call attention to the line's colloquial, and sarcastically humorous extrusion from the libretto) presumably constitutes a refracted gay slur, along the lines of 'he's not the marrying kind', intended to call Paris' already somewhat ambiguous masculinity into doubt. See the further discussion of the opera's masculinities which follows in the next chapter, section 3.4.3.

almost as if their roles have been reversed (although Paris' success will be extremely short-lived); their established father-son dynamic has been disrupted, and this in itself has implications for Priam's authority in the previous scenes. At its final appearance, as Priam tells Paris 'Nor will I go. Stay to defend me till I am ready. Keep all away', this former figure of power and authority (emphasised by the link to Act I, Scene 1) remains loyal to his kingdom, even in his weakened state; the horrors which Priam feared in Act II, Scene 1 have been realised, and while Priam's sense of responsibility to and for his city is emphatically illustrated, the reader becomes painfully aware that his agency and autonomy were in fact *always already* an illusion.

The instrumental introduction to Priam's principal aria 'A father and a King' is played by the lower strings, with staggered entries moving up through the tessitura and concomitant crescendo, preceding Priam's vocal entry (figure 2.21). This motif is imbued with a sense of gravitas – the weight of Priam's double responsibilities lies heavy on his shoulders:

A father and a King. So was I once a baby, born without choice so might I, his father, have been rejected by my parents to be killed. But then, this child, would not have been born. He is born because I lived. Shall he die that I may live? A father and a King. O child who cannot choose to live or die, I choose for you.

The spatial perspective draws this moment into view with its reprise in Act III, Scene 2, but allows the mutual implications of the connection to be considered by the reader, without concern for precedence of one instantiation over the other:

A father and a King. My death they said, but never Hector's. Had they said Hector's, I would have killed the other in the cradle. O yes I would. No doubt of it.

Considering these outpourings in parallel, rather than as antecedent and consequent, significantly alters the reader's interpretation of Priam's character. Whereas traditional diachronic perception would read Priam's Act III regret as a genuine

226

Priam

f *#* *p*

A fath - - - -

espr. sonoro

p cresc. (mp) (mf) f

marc.

espr. sonoro

pp cresc. (mp) (mf) f

marc.

espr. sonoro

pp cresc. (mp) (mf) f

marc.

pp cresc. (mp) (mf) f

marc.

er and a King.

Figure 2.21: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 1 – bars 226-32

expression of the desire to turn back time and make a different decision, and simultaneously as an admission that Priam never really intended for the Young Guard to kill Paris, synchronic interpretation under the spatial model brings into

focus the reality that even if the prophecy had specified Hector's death, Priam would still have been faced with the choice either to kill his son, or to inflict death and destruction on others. The spatial comparison of these two moments illustrates the common phenomenon of believing that one would act differently with the benefit of hindsight. Priam's absolute conviction that he would have definitively ensured Paris' death (presumably rather than just ordering a servant to kill him and assuming that servant would obey) appears, when presented in conjunction with his earlier indecision and struggle with the choice before him, rather less convincing. Conversely, the idea that Priam's instincts would be different if Hector's death was a consideration in his decision reminds the reader that at the moment of his initial decision, Priam's words do not acknowledge that lives other than his own will be affected by the choice he makes.

There are two further manifestations of this material in Act III Scene 2: Priam – 'I do not want these deaths, I want my own'; and the Young Guard and Old Man – 'Lie there and judge yourself, father and King!' The former reveals the extent of the guilt Priam feels for causing Hector's death, and the downfall of Troy, and suggests to the spatial reader that his prioritising of others above himself is genuine to at least some extent. The latter imbues Priam's original choice with confirmation that this is his defining moment; the broader interpretation of this directive from the chorus is that given the impossible nature of the choice with which Priam is faced, his last and only judge will be himself.

At all but her first appearance onstage, Hecuba is portrayed with an instantly recognizable violin motif (figure 2.22). Its first manifestation here comes as she reacts to the Old Man's interpretation of her dream, and the flurrying motion, rapidly ascending and descending, intertwined with her vocal line, aptly conveys the emotional

turmoil behind her seemingly immovable conviction that the only acceptable course of action is to kill baby Paris.



Figure 2.22: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 1 – bar 195

Spatial interpretation draws this instance into parallel with Priam's agreement to her proposal later in the scene; the presentation of Athene during the Judgement of Paris; Hecuba's plea to Andromache to call Hector away from the battle and thereby save him from certain death at the start of Act III; her prayer to Athene at the end of Act III, Scene 1; and her dialogue with Paris as she asks to see Priam in the opera's final scene. In this light, Hecuba's certitude in Act I, Scene 1 is lent further weight by Priam's appropriation of her motif as he pronounces 'Let the child be killed', and conversely, her proposal to expose Paris appears as Priam's true instinct as King, despite the outward confusion between his responsibilities as King and his duties as father. Paris' rejection of Athene at the end of Act I finds an aural parallel with Hecuba's rejection of him as a baby in the reader's mind;⁷⁴ and the close identification of Hecuba and Athene is lent further emphasis by the linking of Athene's offer to Paris in Act I with Hecuba's supplication to the goddess in Act III. The final appearance of Hecuba's motif in the last scene of the opera is a fragmented variation, inflecting the personal suffering she has undergone with a certain degree of irony, since even though

⁷⁴Although there is no implication of this connection in the text of the libretto or the text of the *Fabulae/Iliad*, and I am not suggesting it is a direct part of the narrative here.

her initial instincts are correct (in terms of her troubling dream, and her conviction to kill Paris as a baby), she lacks the autonomy to control her own fate. She desolately asks Paris to ‘Let him [Priam] kiss his wife goodbye’; here as throughout, she is subject to the will of the men around her.



Figure 2.23: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 3 – bars 1102-5

Andromache is similarly identified with a specific motif, played by the cellos (figure 2.23). The first appearance of this is in fact in representation of the Andromache’s alter-ego, the goddess Hera, during the Judgement of Paris, and spatial interpretation ties this moment to the opening of Act III as Andromache anxiously awaits Hector’s return from battle, knowing all the while that his death is inevitable; to her supplication to Hera at the end of that scene; and to her dialogue with Paris as she too asks to see Priam in the final scene. Paris’ disavowal of Hera is characteristic of Andromache’s submission as an impotent female throughout the opera. In every instance, Andromache’s position dictates that she must request approval or assistance, which she is always denied, from another more powerful, male, figure, or in the case of the opening of Act III, she is dependent on the return of Hector ostensibly for her entire future existence. The parallels between these moments created under the spatial paradigm cement the impression of Andromache’s utter lack of autonomy for the reader.

The insistent opening rhythmic figure of Act I, Interlude 1 (bars 292 $ff.$) which leads into the first formal choral ode,⁷⁵ returns in Act III, Scene 2, as the Young

⁷⁵See further discussion in Ch. 3, section 3.3.2.

Guard sings ‘What have you done to your son, Paris now?’ The spatial view confirms the appropriateness of drawing these two moments together: the former drives the music forward as the chorus reveal their narrative role to the audience immediately following Priam’s directive to the Young Guard to kill Paris; the latter comes as the Young Guard compels Priam to consider again his recent actions towards his son (i.e. the fact that he is responsible for bringing Paris back to Troy). With the latter in mind, the former is inflected with the knowledge that Priam’s fatherly responsibility toward Paris is far from ended; with the former in mind, the latter moment confirms Priam’s apparent responsibility for the destruction caused by the realisation of Paris’ prophecy.

Smaller-scale connections are also evident from spatial analysis of Tippett’s musical language. In the introduction to the Judgement of Paris at the end of Act I, Hermes’ vocal line pauses, elaborating the enunciation of Aphrodite’s name with a portamento transition from a top B \flat (by far the highest note in this passage) down to a B \sharp the octave below after the straightforward declamation of ‘Athene’ and ‘Hera’ in the previous bar (figure 2.24); it is immediately evident here that Aphrodite will receive the golden apple, representing a prefiguring of the action and thus a deviation of plot from story.

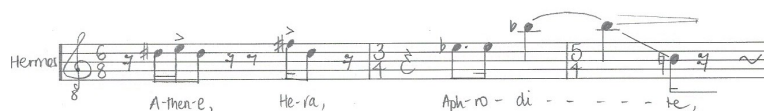


Figure 2.24: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 3 – bars 1052-4

In Act I, Scene 2 the reader is also offered disclosure of the bull-riding boy’s identity far in advance of his utterance of his name: the use of the solo oboe draws the scene into immediate parallel with its predecessor, suggesting Paris’ presence; this is further

emphasized by the strikingly similar figuring to Hecuba's characteristic violin motif of Paris' accompanying oboe line in bars 553 $ff.$, as he excitedly confirms that his father will let him go to Troy, and asks Hector who his own father is. Additionally during this same scene, Paris' utterances are frequently accompanied by the divisi violas which later represent Helen, prefiguring their partnership. The flute music which is used to open Paris and Helen's Act I, Scene 3 love duet is redeployed in Act III, Scene 4, when Helen arrives and seeks audience with Priam through Paris, with whom she shares a 'long embrace'; their love endures despite the trials with which it has been challenged, and from a spatial viewpoint this alters our perception of their relationship in its earlier, superficially more lustful (and, by implication, less genuine) phase.

As demonstrated above, then, Tippett's clever and imaginative use of melodic and rhythmic motifs, specific timbral effects, and other more subtle aural clues, creates nothing short of a rupture between story and plot which completely transforms the reader's experience of the opera's narrative, particularly with regard to the concept of prophecy, their permanent knowledge of the story's tragic conclusion, their enhanced understanding of the opera's complex and multifaceted characters, and the overarching theme of Priam's conflicted self-identity as representative of a broader-scale tension between public and private spheres.

2.7 A Final Note on Structure

We now return briefly to *King Priam*'s musical paratexts, in order to conclude this discussion of the mapping of story and plot. Max Paddison, interpreting Adorno, writes of music resembling a loose conglomerate of fractured, diverse and often irreconcilable elements as 'acting as an immanent critique of totality, of the

universal, and of a wholeness which is seen as false';⁷⁶ perhaps constituting a response to the condition of modernity. Stravinsky's *Symphonies* might be seen in this light; indeed, Cross confirms that the work's 'critique of totality is explicit; its oppositions make little attempt at reconciliation.'⁷⁷ Furthermore, it is in this arguably ideologically-situated gesture that Cross locates the work's modernist credentials. He reinforces this conclusion with reference to Adorno's 'dilemma of modernism': 'the predicament faced by the artist caught between, on the one hand, the traditional demands of the artwork for unity and integration (the harmonious relationship between part and whole) and, on the other hand, the loss of faith in any overarching unity on both individual and social levels in the face of the evident fragmentation of modern existence';⁷⁸ presumably a successful modernist artist is able to achieve a workable balance between these two stipulations, and Cross certainly asserts Stravinsky's primacy in this respect.

Can the same critique be observed in *King Priam*, and if so, would we want to draw these same conclusions about Tippett's potential intentions and his potential status as a modernist composer? The potential for the interpretation of some aspect of a 'universal' in the works chosen for study in this thesis has already been established, as has Tippett's dedication to creating musical works which offer the reader the opportunity to engage actively with the materials with which they are presented in order to experience some revelation relating to shared aspects of the human condition; *King Priam* evidently both extols and illustrates this sentiment. We might thus initially consider the opera's form as incongruous with the work's subject matter, and

⁷⁶Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 149.

⁷⁷Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*, 26.

⁷⁸Max Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1996), 52.

its underlying message, and like Cross, we might be troubled by ‘a contradiction at the heart of the work: in order to project what is undoubtedly his most direct, linear plot, Tippett opts for a musical structure predicated on fragmentation, juxtaposition and discontinuity.’⁷⁹ Reading the work from a spatial perspective, however, allows us to see this troubling musical structure as a deliberate device designed to highlight particular aspects of the narrative by setting up deviations between story and plot. Using spatial analytical techniques, we are able to look beyond surface impressions to assert an alternative reading, perhaps one in which the disruptive block form of the opera’s music draws attention to prevalent social, cultural and economic divisions – whether predicated on class, race, gender, religion, or particular ideology – overcome in synchronous perception by an overarching, all-encompassing sense of humanity, represented by the universally-encountered tribulations of love, family life and conflict endured by the opera’s characters and bound into inevitability by Tippett’s musical constructions. Perhaps it is in this manner that Tippett strikes his own, idiosyncratic, balance between the internal musico-dramatic integrity of the work, and the need to respond to the sense of loss of social cohesion emblematic of modernist artistic endeavour. It is a balance of a strikingly different hue to that struck by Stravinsky, yet it should by no means be considered less valid.

Of course, such a reading is too human, too subjective, and too socially-situated for Cross, who draws a significant and seemingly insurmountable distinction between Tippett and Stravinsky focussed on perceptions of compositional objectivity. Arguably Stravinsky constructs a similar juxtaposition of divergent impulses in his opera-oratorio *Oedipus Rex*: the work is based on myth with a linearly developmental

⁷⁹Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*, 64.

plot, yet its music is construed as a collage consisting of a combination of diverse, incongruous fragments. Cross accepts this compositional choice on the part of Stravinsky, however, rendering it aesthetically acceptable on the premise that the composer also ‘abandoned any pretence of a single narrative’ through the insertion of interpolated vernacular narration within the Latin libretto, creating a crucial sense of critical distance between the work and its constituent originating materials.⁸⁰ With Tippett however, Cross writes of a ‘lack of critique [...] the absence of Stravinsky’s “objectivity”’, which almost entirely precludes the interpretation of his music.⁸¹ To write of ‘objective’ art in this context is, surely, nonsensical at the very least. I wish to refute Cross’ claim on two grounds: firstly, that Tippett does not lack critical distance but rather creates it in a different manner to Stravinsky despite the myriad instances of paratextual synergy between *King Priam* and several of Stravinsky’s works; and secondly, that no music, nor indeed art of any kind, can be truly objective, and thus that to ascribe critical value to Stravinsky’s ‘objectivity’ is both disingenuous and unhelpful.

In summary then, Tippett’s *King Priam* emerges from this initial contextualisation – among its literary, dramatic, and musical paratexts – and formal, structural, and aesthetic survey, as a work in which the two formal components of the narrative have, deliberately and ingeniously, been torn apart from one another and set on individual, independent trajectories, to serve an ultimately more complex and fruitful purpose. What remains, in the following chapter, now that we have investigated the details of the musical language and illustration which combine to

⁸⁰Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*, 64.

⁸¹Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*, 65.

achieve this rupturing effect, is to interrogate the work's hermeneutic potential, examining the engaged spatial reader's interaction with, and participation in, the Trojan War mythology as manifested in Tippett's music, and the effect of this act in *creating* meaning in the work. The reader's active role in contributing something of their own experience to the interpretative mechanism constitutes the overarching focus for the analysis, and the characterization of Priam as 'everyman', a spatial reader of his own narrative, allegorizes this important aspect of the methodological approach taken in this thesis. Of particular significance is the function of the work's foundational mythology in mediating intangible aspects of the universal for the individual reader, and the role of *King Priam's choros* – illuminated through paratextual comparison with the choral function in fifth-century Athenian tragic drama – is interrogated with regard to their facilitation of this process. A range of interpretations of the opera's perennial theme of conflict, in its various presentations – often demarcated through binary oppositions, forms a prelude to the reading of *King Priam's* social commentary. Finally, Tippett's second opera is considered in terms of its potential status as variously 'Greek', and/or 'modernist'.

Chapter 3

King Priam: Critical Spatial Readings of Mediation

3.1 Prologue: Constructing and Deconstructing Subjectivity

Having established the rupture between plot and story in *King Priam*'s narrative design and formal musical construction in the previous chapter, the ground has now been prepared for the thorough and challenging interrogation of the work's hermeneutic potential which follows here. Before embarking on this scrutinization of the opera's capacity for social commentary, Tippett's philosophical and psychoanalytical approaches – particularly his adoption of Jungian image theory – are considered, as is the vital role of the engaged reader in creating meaning, mapped for allegorical comparison (and thereby mediation, in a microcosm of the overall function of mythology) onto the figure of Priam. In addition, the central mediating function of the Athenian *choros*, mirrored in *King Priam*, is discussed in detail, illuminating the hugely important contribution made by the opera's seemingly peripheral, minor, unnamed characters. The overarching theme of conflict is highlighted and treated in some depth as a launch-point for discussion of the opera's mediation of binaries, with the work's multifaceted conceptualizations of male and female, or masculine and feminine, gender identities surveyed as a point of particular interest.

Arnold Whittall wrote in 1980 that relatively little technical discussion of Tippett's music had been published, and still in 2014, the number of in-depth

analytical accounts remains low, excluding the significant contributions made by David Clarke, Rowena Pollard, and Whittall himself. References to the ‘recalcitrance of the music itself to analysis’ occur frequently throughout extant scholarship, and it is only recently that some analysts have realised that ‘that recalcitrance is best dealt with not by attempting to subvert it, but by embracing it’.¹ Clarke, along with Pollard and Whittall tends towards pitch set class theory as codified by Allen Forte in order to analyse Tippett’s music, including *King Priam*. All three are keen to remind us that analysis for its own sake lacks point and value and advocate a socially situated, hermeneutic reading of the work in question, following Whittall’s example in investigating potential connections between definable features of Tippett’s musical language and elements of the dramatic narrative. While the musical analysis in this chapter will maintain a broader focus than is often the case with pitch set class technique, it will combine micro-analysis of Tippett’s musical vocabulary with broader observations about the structure of the work as a whole, and macro-analytical comparisons with its main paratexts, as set out in this thesis’s foundational methodological framework. The resultant spatial investigation will yield further evidence to support the claim made by the thesis as a whole for the mutual interdependence of historical and analytical inquiry in relation to music.

3.1.1 Jungian images

Tippett’s appreciation of the dialectics of Carl Gustav Jung is widely documented. A crucial tenet of Jung’s understanding of the psychological universe is the sense of a primordial, collective unconscious, of some inner reality shared between all human beings that remains unaffected by individual action or circumstance. Clarke highlights

¹David Clarke (ed.), *Tippett Studies*, x.

the ideological quality of Jung's construct, writing that the collective unconscious is 'presented as a domain in which alienation is assuaged, while making no reference to the associated social and economic conditions which a more politically-engaged commentator might see as its ultimate cause.'² This is an important point, but for the present purpose what is relevant is that Tippett subscribed to this ideologically constructed concept, taking from Jung the idea of the collective unconscious as a 'wellspring of creative activity, a spontaneous drive, an autonomous complex which is liable to exercise an imperious command over the artist'.³

David Clarke provides the following summary of the Jungian thought behind Tippett's references to musical 'images':

When Tippett refers to (musical) images, he is associating them with a quality which, if not mythological, is in a certain sense primordial or trans-personal: 'the immense reservoir of the human psyche where images age-old and new boil together in some demoniac cauldron.' While the primordial image might be seen as the generating thesis, its antithetical counterpart is the idea. The former is characterised by its 'concretism', a fusion of 'thinking', 'feeling' and 'sensation'. The latter is arrived at through 'differentiation', specifically of thought from the other psychological functions which coalesce within the image in its primordial form. The idea 'is nothing other than the primordial image intellectually formulated'; subjecting the primordial image to 'a particularly intense development of thought' that brings it 'to the surface' [...] The 'symbol' is the manifestation of primordial image which 'embraces the undifferentiated concretised feeling' and the intellectually abstracted idea. There is a moment of synthesis in which the final term mediates the first two such that they partake of one another. The symbol is the means of giving form to the unknowable: the 'best possible formulation of an unknown thing' [...] The final material construed as a 'symbol' embraces both thought and feeling, capturing both the abstract, intellectually formulated idea and the undifferentiated contents of the unconscious.⁴

Mapping these concepts onto *King Priam*, it is easiest to start with the symbol – here

²Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett*, 16.

³Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett*, 16.

⁴Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett*, 18-20.

the opera itself, the words and music through which the events of the narrative and the feelings of the characters are portrayed. The primordial image, the generating thesis which is both universal and yet unknown, is what Tippett refers to as ‘the mysterious nature of human choice’. The idea, produced as the result of dedicated cognitive and intellectual interrogation of the image, consists of the multiple instances within the opera’s narrative where its characters are faced with a real, quantifiable problem, which must be resolved through moral choice.

Imagistic conceptualization of musical material may once again be traced back to Stravinsky’s works of the second two decades of the twentieth century, and from this point strong parallels can be drawn with contemporary European art – particularly originating from the Cubist movement. Cross applies to Stravinsky’s *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* John Golding’s observation of the perennial, if on occasion subtle, presence of images in Cubist art, ‘sometimes they materialize only gradually from the complex of interacting transparent planes which surround and indeed constitute them, only to be reabsorbed into the painting’s overall spatial flux.’⁵ Perhaps we might fruitfully assess *King Priam* in this manner, noting the myriad instances within the opera where the primordial image (the mysterious nature of human choice) surfaces to remind the audience of the enigmatic quasi-presence of fate, ever directing the narrative and the plight of the individual characters. Indeed, Philip Truman summarises the overarching theme of the Oedipus myth, upon which Stravinsky’s opera-oratorio of 1927 is based, as ‘a Greek tragedy in which the notion that man could control his destiny is refuted’;⁶ *King Priam*, too, can be defined in this way,

⁵John Golding, *Cubism: A History and an Analysis, 1907-1914* (Boston: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), 85.

⁶Philip Truman, ‘An Aspect of Stravinsky’s Russianism: Ritual’, *Revue belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap* 46, (1992), 235.

though its literary roots lie in epic poetry rather than tragic drama.

Puffett comments on the absorption of Jungian principles into Tippett's compositional philosophy, highlighting two of his 'rules' for opera composition: firstly, that 'the more collective an artistic imaginative experience is going to be, the more the discovery of suitable material is involuntary'; and secondly, 'while the collective, mythological material is always traditional, the specific twentieth-century quality is the power to transmute such material into an immediate experience of any day.'⁷ The second rule here emphasises the connection between Jung's collective unconscious and the importance to Tippett of composing music that would be universal, and trans-temporal – indeed, with Tippett's music, we might honestly assert that temporality, traditionally conceived, is of little, if any, importance on any level. Puffett's remarks also highlight the particular relevance of the spatial analytical approach for assessing the mediation of individual subjectivity in twentieth-century (modernist) artworks based on mythology.

3.1.2 The Wagnerian Precedent

A major point of communion between Wagner and Tippett is the concept of universality. To Wagner, the fundamental basis of human character was something universal, and he believed mythology (above all Ancient Greek, but additionally Teutonic traditions) to possess this complex quality. Magee writes of Wagner's characters as being 'universally recognisable as individuals [...] embodying universal truths about human beings'.⁸ They are, in short, if not simply archetypes in a Jungian sense, then at least characters whose 'universalised' struggles and experience

⁷Puffett, 'Tippett and the Retreat from Mythology', 10.

⁸Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 84.

are designed to be accessible to any human being in modernity; they are the symbolic representation of aspects of the human condition. As will become clear throughout the course of this chapter, the characters of *King Priam*, and the narrative tropes to which they are subject, may also be described in this manner, particularly given Tippet's advocacy of Jungian psycho-philosophy. Magee furthers his interpretation of Wagner's characterisation by designating 'all the various characters of *The Ring* as multifarious aspects of a single personality, so that the whole gigantic work becomes a presentation of what it is to be a human being.'⁹ Might we see *King Priam*'s agents in the same light? Arguably we cannot regard them on the same scale, since there are far fewer of them; yet we are certainly presented with the human capacity for a number of different types of love, for suffering and joy, for the pursuit of power, for dedication to a goal and the sheer pig-headedness to continue in the face of insurmountable odds, for the desire for vengeance, for compassion, for courage and cowardice, for selfishness and altruism and ultimately, for self-sacrifice. If not a complete picture of human experience, this seems a fairly comprehensive summary.¹⁰ Magee describes Wagner's re-envisioning of music-drama as a 'work of art that will express the human being in his totality of body, intellect and heart';¹¹ *King Priam* was certainly conceived in this vein, albeit on a smaller scale than that of *Der Ring*.

Cooke too confirms Wagner's location of archetypes of the universality of human experience in the staple characters of mythology, writing that the composer 'believed myths to be humanity's intuitive expression, in symbolic form, of the

⁹Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 85.

¹⁰This description is also highly appropriate for application to the works of Shakespeare, with *King Lear* as perhaps the epitomic example. While there is not space to pursue this paratextual comparison here, I am indebted to Michael Graham for this insight, and subsequent interesting discussion.

¹¹Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 90.

ultimate truths about its own nature and destiny.¹² The epitomic communication of this understanding of human existence, through mythological archetypes, was to be found for both Wagner and Tippett in the tragic drama of Ancient Greece. Again and again throughout his career, Wagner expounded the virtues of Ancient Greek art, tragedy in particular, through both his writings and his musical works, and in this respect Tippett's work can more concretely be seen to accord with his predecessor's ideals. For Wagner, as for Stravinsky, the chorus maintained a vital role within, and outside of, the drama; however for the German composer, this function was always fulfilled with the instrumental music of the orchestra where in Stravinsky's works it switches from orchestra to one or more characters onstage between different works. As I will demonstrate below, Tippett fuses both approaches, with the choral role fulfilled both in the instrumental music of the opera, and by the vocal parts for several characters.

3.2 Subjective Discourse

3.2.1 The Reader Creates Meaning

On Aristotle's model, tragedy's emotive power is concentrated into particular narrative moments: *peripeteia* (reversal), *anagnôrisis* (recognition), and *pathos* (suffering) – it is these event-types which imbue tragic drama with its compelling force and facilitate *katharsis*. In *King Priam*, Paris' escape from exposure, Hector's death at Achilles' hands, and Priam's supplication to Achilles for the return of Hector's body constitute *peripeteia*; Priam and Hector's acceptance of Paris' wish to join the Trojan community, Andromache's revelation that the war is no longer being fought

¹²Cooke, *I Saw the World End*, 10.

over Helen, Achilles and Priam's acceptance of their imminent deaths, and Priam's gentleness towards Helen in the final scene constitute *anagnôrisis*; and a sense of *pathos* is evident in almost every scene. These moments create connections across the narrative, tying together discrete and temporally distant moments in the opera's story.

We have already acknowledged both the strenuously participatory role played by the spatial reader in creating meaning through interpretation as they actively engage with a mythological artwork, and the centrality of Attic tragedy as a paratextual source in our spatial reading of *King Priam*. The issue of authorship in relation to Greek tragedy is complex. The flexibility of the genre allowed Athenian poets artistic space in which to compose alternative versions of well-rehearsed narratives in their own idiosyncratic manner, mediating their audiences' interpretative experience by meeting, deflecting, subverting or defeating expectations arising from engagement with and knowledge of a particular story as it is propounded in various paratexts. In addition, Athenian poets are described as avant-garde innovators, social prophets of a kind, who 'moved ahead of contemporary thinking, exploring or problematising the practical and theoretical possibilities' of social existence through their works.¹³ By creating dramatic distance from the audience's presumptions about how the narrative will be plotted, the poet is able to raise questions about the socially and culturally contingent backdrop to the tragic story and, crucially, invite the audience to examine their own ideological commitments, thereby opening their subjectivity to mediation, and encouraging the kind of active engagement with the artwork required in order to realise its hermeneutic potential across a spectrum

¹³Paul Cartledge, "'Deep plays': theatre as process in Greek civic life', *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, 21.

of uniquely differentiated responses, conditioned by the unique contribution of the individual reader. We might thus reasonably speculate that Athenian tragedy had a deliberately didactic function, not only in fulfilling a particular role within a cultural programme designed, whether consciously or not, to deliver social betterment, but additionally teaching its audiences to engage actively with their own cultural experience, rather than passively receiving it. Cartledge writes that ‘tragedy’s characteristic method of instruction was analogical, allusive and indirect.’¹⁴ Given *King Priam*’s tragic dramatic characteristics, we might therefore require a detailed investigation of the opera in order to assess its didactic potential beyond Tippet’s obvious commentary on the futility of armed conflict. Of paramount importance throughout, however, must be the role of the reader as creator of meaning, as Easterling asserts, the tragic poet was not to be heralded as the originator of any social commentary which might be read into his dramatic works: ‘No genre is so definitively dialogic, nor conceals the authorial persona to such an extreme degree [...] the authorial voice of the tragic poet himself is more elusive in this genre than in any other ancient literary form, including comedy.’¹⁵

3.2.2 The Eponymous Hero as Individual, or, Priam as Everyman

King Priam is, in effect, a musically-catalysed condensation of a multi-perspective, broad-scale narrative (from Homer) into an intimate, localised view of events based around Priam, the eponymous hero. Interestingly, Priam is not the central protagonist of the *Iliad*, nor even one of the group of characters who might reasonably assert a claim to that position; neither is he afforded a great deal of attention in any other

¹⁴Cartledge, ‘“Deep plays”’, 19.

¹⁵Easterling, ‘Form and performance’, 119-20.

surviving literary adumbrations of the history of Troy and its devastating conquest which we might consider as paratexts. However, a significant number of literary texts provide models for the re-telling of a known narrative from the perspective of a normatively marginal character. These works, while not directly relevant enough to Tippett's opera to be considered paratextual sources within the scope of the present study, exemplify a trend which Slavoj Žižek identifies as foreshadowing a typically postmodern aesthetic decision:

Many of Shakespeare's plays re-tell an already well-known great story [...] what makes *Troilus [and Cressida]* the exception is that, in re-telling the well-known story, it shifts the accent to what were, in the original, minor and marginal characters [...] In this sense, *Troilus* can be said to prefigure one of the paradigmatic postmodern procedures of re-telling a well-known classical story from the standpoint of a marginal character. Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* does it with *Hamlet*, while here, Shakespeare himself carries out the move.¹⁶

Perhaps the most obvious paratextual comparison to be made here is with Wotan's central position in the mythic power struggle of *Der Ring*. The 'dethroning'¹⁷ of Siegfried between Wagner's initial conception of part of the cycle, and its eventual expansion and realisation finds a parallel in Tippett's conscious decision to focus on Priam, rather than Paris, Hector, or Achilles as his central character during his selection of narrative materials from Homer's epic. In the fragmented bipolar political and social reality of the mid-twentieth century, Tippett's decision to place Priam at the centre of a narrative in which he is not normally seen as the main protagonist might variously be interpreted as a reflection of mid-twentieth-century existentialism, which places the individual at the centre of cosmic reality – in effect prioritising the subject as spatial reader – or as an anti-pluralist reaction to the social devastation

¹⁶Slavoj Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2009), 27.

¹⁷Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 105.

caused by two cataclysmic world wars.

Further extension of this macro-analytical comparison with Wagnerian paratexts¹⁸ revolves around the specific parameters of the shift of focus to a different character, drawing examples not only from *Der Ring*, but also from *Parsifal* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. In all three of these operatic works, the replacement protagonist appears older, wiser and ultimately more experienced than the young hero whose position he has assumed. Magee writes:

In each case the older man has, or acquires, a deeply perceptive and marvellously complex understanding [...] The older man comes to accept with full resignation the imminent loss of his own power to the rising generation, and accepts it partly because he eventually recognises the true potential of the young man, but he is also deeply concerned to correct the youth's false values and expectations. Among other things he tries to get the young man to understand that other people have feelings too, and are not just to be despised or overridden; that what exists does so according to its own inner nature and can not be arbitrarily changed or swept aside; that the existing order of things is a repository of accumulated wisdom and values from the past, some of it highly to be treasured, so that while it is important to root out from it the dead, the decaying and the corrupt, it is also essential to recognise the good and carry that forward into the future.¹⁹

King Priam stands as a further example of this characterisation, except that ultimately Priam's efforts to reform Paris are limited in success by the inevitable fall of Troy and both of their deaths.

Cooke concludes that Wotan symbolises 'Man in the sense of Man-in-supreme-power [...] the type of man who has governed humanity throughout its history – chieftan, king, emperor, dictator, president'²⁰ and is thus identifiable in

¹⁸Of course, the potential for extensive comparative readings is far greater than it has been possible to accommodate in this thesis. A full discussion of thematic and musical parallels in Tippett and Wagner, covering (even just in *King Priam*) ideas of leadership, identity, social responsibility, and response to conflict, to name but a few, could form the subject of at least a book-length study on its own.

¹⁹Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 106.

²⁰Cooke, *I Saw the World End*, 248.

the real world across time, but in a position that is isolated from the social experience of the majority. What Cooke fails to include in this characterisation is that Wotan is also a father, a husband and a brother-in-law, and is connected to other characters in a manner instantly recognisable to any individual. Priam, too, is a ruler, but in Tippett's opera his family relationships are emphasised arguably even more than his status as leader of his city. More importantly, Priam's suffering dominates the opera, particularly the final act; here, too, we can draw distinctive parallels between Tippett's work and its Wagnerian paratexts. Schopenhauer provides an apposite characterisation of Priam in his description of the epitomic nobleman (such a delineation is also applicable to several characters within Wagner's dramatic oeuvre):

We always picture a very noble character to ourselves as having a certain trace of silent sadness that is anything but constant peevishness over daily annoyances (that would be an ignoble trait, and might lead us to fear a bad disposition). It is a consciousness that has resulted from knowledge of the vanity of all possessions and of the suffering of all life, not merely of one's own. Such knowledge, however, may first of all be awakened by suffering personally experienced, especially by a single great suffering [...]²¹

Priam's suffering, of course, is perpetuated by the loss of his son Hector, the devastation of his city and home, and eventually ends with his own death. Wagner, too, portrays great suffering and death in his music-dramas, as Mark Berry confirms: 'Wagner confronts rather than avoids both the horror of death and the suffering of life. His standpoint is alert to the darkness of so much of human existence.' He further elaborates on Wagner's view that 'only through man's death can he evince ultimate absorption into the universality of men. Such a death must not be fortuitous, but

²¹Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* vol. I, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), 396.

necessary, the logical outcome of his deeds and his humanity.’²² It is Priam’s humanity and deeds that prevent Paris’ exposure as a baby, and thus ensure his own downfall. Berry quotes Feuerbach to describe Wotan’s eventual demise in a manner which might also be transferred to Priam:

Only when the human once again recognises that there exists not merely an *appearance of death*, but an actual and real death, a death that completely terminates the life of an individual, only when he returns to the awareness of his finitude will he gain the courage to begin a new life and to experience the pressing need for making... that which is actually infinite [death] into the theme and content of his entire spiritual activity.²³

This transformative moment draws together the three tragic event types (*peripeteia*, *anagnôrisis*, and *pathos*), which under the spatial paradigm mutually implicate each other throughout the narrative. It is this acceptance of the inevitability of physical death and the confines of human mortality – the one completely unarguable universal aspect of human experience in any world-view – which paves the way for Tippett’s rather idealistic uplifting end to the opera, the transcendence of earthly concerns which provides comfort and solace to the tortured sympathetic audience. But, crucially, this effect must be conveyed musically. Magee writes of the similar effect of Wagner’s operas:

Wagner’s art makes life acceptable by suspending the reality principle, even when what is happening onstage seems to deny that. Those who lose on the stage win in the music. They may have been destroyed by the world, but there is a higher sense in which they are redeemed, and have come into their own at last.²⁴

We might argue that Priam is demonstrably stronger than the forces which control his existence, because he is able to accept his own lack of autonomy; however, it is

²²Mark Berry, *Treacherous Bonds and Laughing Fire: Politics and Religion in Wagner’s “Ring”* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 163.

²³Ludwig Feuerbach, *Thoughts*; 17, quoted in Berry, *Treacherous Bonds and Laughing Fire*, 164.

²⁴Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 119.

somewhat more difficult to show that the opera's final music conveys Priam's higher redemption to the point that we, as the audience, feel uplifted.

A brief return to the necessary presence of war in *King Priam* and to Tippett's mediated reception of philosophical traditions through contemporary interpreters brings us to Nietzsche. Clarke reports that Tippett accessed Nietzsche's ideas primarily through his own near contemporary, W. B. Yeats. Yeats in turn interpreted Nietzsche through William Blake, who was an English contemporary of the German philosopher. All four men, albeit in differing manners, asserted the existence of conflict as a *sine qua non*, but as Clarke comments, 'not as an end in itself, but as a condition for vigour, progress and creativity.'²⁵ An understanding of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and the application of its central tenets to *King Priam* can help to unravel the manner in which the opera offers moments of *katharsis* for its audience, principally through the eponymous tragic hero. Clarke writes that Nietzsche's theories provide an 'apposite characterization of Priam', through their elaboration of the culture of the Dionysiac and a comparison with Shakespeare's Hamlet:

'Dionysiac man may be said to resemble Hamlet: both have looked deeply into the true nature of things, they have *understood* and are now loath to act. They realise that no action of theirs can work any change in the external condition of things, and they regard the imputation as ludicrous or debasing that they should set right the time which is out of joint. Understanding kills action, for in order to act we require the veil of illusion; such is Hamlet's doctrine [...] Now no comfort any longer avails, desire reaches beyond the transcendental world, beyond the gods themselves, and existence, together with its gulling reflection in the gods and an immortal Beyond, is denied. The truth once seen, man is aware everywhere of the ghastly absurdity of existence, comprehends the symbolism of Ophelia's fate and the wisdom of the wood sprite Silenus [Dionysus' companion]: nausea invades him.' While the veil of illusion falls from the eyes of the tragic hero and he is left to his fate, the audience is redeemed through the intervention of the aesthetic. The apprehension of these

²⁵Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett*, 86.

insights through the medium of artistic representation makes life bearable, offering 'metaphysical solace'.²⁶

In *King Priam*, the 'intervention of the aesthetic' might be considered to be constituted by Hermes' 'Hymn to Music' in Act III. Having just heard Achilles and Priam discussing their own deaths, and acknowledging their own resignation to fate, Hermes' ode offers the audience a moment of calm and solace, before the violence of the final scene:

I come as messenger of death. For the story will soon end. A timeless music played in time.

[To the spectators]

Do not imagine all the secrets of life can be known from a story. O but feel the pity and the terror as Priam dies. He already breathes an air as from another planet.²⁷ The world where he is going, where he has gone, cannot communicate itself through him. (He will speak only to Helen in the end) But through the timeless music.

[Facing the altar once more]

O divine music. O stream of sound in which the states of soul flow, surfacing and drowning. While we sit watching from the bank, the mirrored world within, for "Mirror upon mirror mirrored is all the show." O divine music. Melt our hearts, renew our love.

3.3 *King Priam* to the Engaged Spatial Reader: Mediating the Universal and the Individual

Perhaps the most important aspect of the dialogue between the works of Stravinsky and Tippett, in aesthetic terms, relates to their shared pre-occupation with ideas about the collectivity and commonality of human experience, evident particularly in

²⁶Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett*, 66.

²⁷We might take this line at face value, assuming it to mean that Priam has already passed on, even though he is not quite physically dead as yet; alternatively, we might engage in a deeper interpretation, making paratextual reference to the final movement of Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2 in F sharp minor, Op. 10 (1908) and its setting of the Stefan George poem *Entrückung*, in which we are drawn into a nuanced and complex exploration of the idea of enraptured transportation to another, transcendent realm, perhaps even apotheosis.

their fascination with ritual and senses of time (or lack thereof).²⁸ *Agon* is cited by Cross as a strong example of the underlying presence of a ‘ritual dimension’ in Stravinsky’s stage works,²⁹ and we might also draw parallels with *The Soldier’s Tale* and *Oedipus Rex*. Philip Truman refers to a ‘ritualistic agent of depersonalisation’ in Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex*, asserting that the cumulative distancing effect of the composer’s musical language and dramatic devices is to enhance the ‘universality’ of the originating mythology. Cross reports that Stravinsky’s choice of the Oedipus myth for his opera-oratorio resulted from the need for a ‘universal plot’, through which he might ‘leave the play, as play, behind, thinking by this to distil the dramatic essence and to free [him]self for a greater degree of focus on a purely musical dramatisation.’³⁰

The following definition of what ritual means in conjunction with Stravinsky’s music invokes immediate parallels with Tippett’s concept of musical images, and demonstrates the appositeness of the spatial paradigm as a focal lens through which to examine mythological artworks:

Ritual is concerned with the expression of the collective, of the community, as in ancient ceremonies and acts of religious worship; it transcends the mundane through repeated and repetitive actions; it is symbolic rather than representational; it is stylised and is often associated with a special place and language separate from the everyday. For these reasons, *ritual is not primarily concerned with linear time or narratives* and it cannot easily represent contemporary events. Myth (broadly defined) thus becomes an important part of many rituals because it represents a collective heritage – in Jungian terms, myths and their archetypal characters express directly the collective unconscious.³¹

Ritual becomes relevant in two distinct capacities as we consider the spatial

²⁸The music of Harrison Birtwistle would also provide an interesting point of paratextual comparison in this regard, but this unfortunately lies beyond the scope of the present study.

²⁹Cross, ‘Stravinsky’s Theatres’, 140.

³⁰Cross, ‘Stravinsky’s Theatres’, 143.

³¹Cross, ‘Stravinsky’s Theatres’, 140 (emphasis mine).

interpretation of mythological art. In terms of content, we might view it as a catalyst through which a productive synthesis may be achieved in order to overcome the paradoxical imperatives to express collectivity, on the one hand, and to maintain a mediated distance from definitive identification with aspects of the narrative on the other. On a meta-theoretical level, we might view ritual as an umbrella descriptor for the process by which we, as spatial readers, actively engage with, and contribute something of ourselves to, the artworks which we seek to interpret.

Central to Stravinskian ritual is the concept of distance, in other words, the *semiotic gap*, between the audience and the stage action; *The Soldier's Tale* and *Oedipus Rex* both feature a narrator who occupies a unique role both within and outside of the unfolding narrative, and is thus able to both participate in and externally interpret, for the audience, the events occurring onstage, facilitating the bridging of this gap. Further to this, however, the narrator functions to convey to the audience that they too are 'witnesses to and participants in the act of theatre';³² thus both narrator and audience may be likened to the chorus in Ancient Greek drama. This parity between a stage personage and a work's audience is compounded by historical evidence offered by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*: 'A public of spectators as we know it was unknown to the Greeks. In their theatres, given the way the spectators' space was built up in terraces, raised up in concentric rings, it was possible for everyone quite literally to look out over the collective cultural world around him and with a complete perspective to imagine himself a member of the chorus.'³³ Simply put, the Athenian spectator was encouraged to be an active, engaged, reader. Stravinsky seems to confirm this view, prescribing that his narrators

³²Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*, 138.

³³Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 28.

should be dressed in evening wear, just like that worn by his twentieth-century audiences, rather than the period costumes of his other characters. While Tippett does not include an explicit narrator among *King Priam*'s characters, a specific group assume the choral role, functioning both to progress the opera's narrative at various points, and to comment upon what is happening before them (as described below). Like a Greek chorus, and like Stravinsky's narrators, they are identifiable as separate from the remainder of the characters in that they do not have proper names – rather they are referred to by their job title (Nurse, Young Guard), or a simplistic descriptor (Old Man, offstage chorus) – the only exception to this is Hermes, the messenger God; this degree of intangibility enhances their mediating function.

3.3.1 The Chorus as Mediator

The centrality of the *choros* is one of the most important characteristic features of fifth-century Athenian tragedy. The members of the choral group fulfill a dual function with the drama, they are involved in the events unfolding onstage, yet 'break the fourth wall' by seemingly communicating directly with the audience as they comment on what is happening in discreet choral odes or *choreia*. Albert Henrichs asserts the primacy of these choral interludes in maintaining the referential link between the real world of the audience and the fictional reality inhabited by the opera's characters, in effect, encapsulating their mediating function:

While emphasising their choral identity, they temporarily expand their role as dramatic characters. In fact they acquire a more complex dramatic identity as they perceive their choral dance as an emotional reaction to the event onstage and assume a ritual posture which functions as a link between the cultic reality of the City Dionysia and the imaginary religious world of the tragedies.³⁴

³⁴Albert Henrichs, 'Why should I dance? Choral Self-Referentiality in Greek Tragedy', *Arion* 3/1 (1995), 59.

King Priam's identifiable *choros*, principally the Old Man, Young Guard, and the Nurse, with the addition of Hermes, primarily sing the interludes between scenes, but also feature within specific scenes in more direct interaction with the other characters. The Greek and operatic choruses are merged at points such as the second interlude in Act I, where the three central choral characters are supplemented by a wider group, here the wedding guests. In light of this, perhaps we might see the servile characters as fulfilling between them the role of *choregos* (chorus leader), distinct from the rest of the *choros*. The convention for choral characters, if named at all, to be of lower social standing than the main protagonists is not simply the result of class snobbery. A crucial aspect of the function of the *choros* is to guide the emotional response elicited in the audience by the events playing out onstage; the majority of *King Priam*'s audience members would feel some degree of catalytic affinity with at least one, if not more, of the three central choral figures: a Nurse (quasi-maternal figure and female confidante), the Old Man (wise prophet, paternal figure) and the Young Guard (protector with a strong sense of duty, but the innocence and naivety of youth).

Hall comments on the irony inherent in the position of such characters: 'Slaves, although formally powerless, can wield enormous power in the world of tragedy through their access to dangerous knowledge'.³⁵ Indeed, in *King Priam*, the decision not to expose Paris as a baby is made by the three choral characters, and we might ask whether blame for the war, Priam's death and the ultimate fall of Troy therefore lies with these individuals. Arguably not, since we are led to understand that the prophecy concerning Paris' fate was created by the Olympian deities and as such the

³⁵Hall, 'The sociology of Athenian tragedy', 113.

Nurse, Old Man and Young Guards are simply the gods' puppets.

3.3.2 *King Priam's choros: Analysis of Role and Function*

*'Actors indissolubly bound with me to play a crucial scene.'*³⁶

At the opening of Act I, Scene 1, the offstage group chorus launch the narrative with a series of battle cries (bars 9-13, 23-9, and 37-54 – figure 3.1) which establish from the outset the overriding presence of conflict at the heart of the opera.

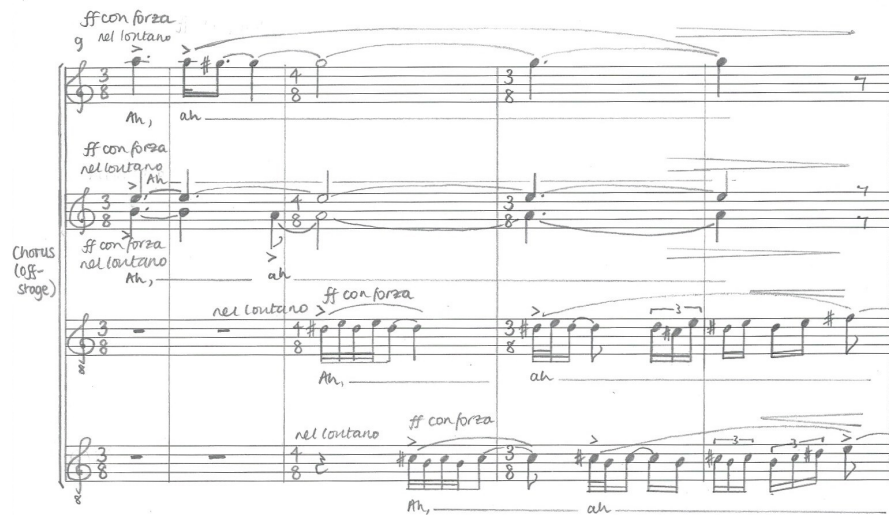


Figure 3.1: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 1 – bars 9-13

During bars 179-91 the Old Man advances the narrative by revealing the prophecy to Priam and Hecuba, 'The dream means that Paris, this child, will cause as by an inexorable fate, his father's death'; and at bars 223-5 he directly invites Priam to respond to Hecuba's lamentation: 'What says King Priam?' At bars 266-83, the orchestra take over the choral role, illustrating the actions of the Young Guard as he

³⁶Priam sings these words to the Nurse, Young Guard and Old Man during Act I, Scene 2 (bars 706-10).

takes Paris to be exposed. Following the Young Guard's exit with baby Paris, we are prepared for the first of the explicit *choreia*, as indicated in the stage directions which state at bar 284 that 'The Old Man and the Nurse come down to the footlights. By some easily manipulated change of dress, or by a mask perhaps, or a gesture, they can become a commenting Chorus. When speaking as Chorus they declaim, when speaking as expressive of their roles, they do not declaim.'³⁷



Figure 3.2: *King Priam* Act I, Interlude 1 – bar 292

At the start of Interlude 1 (bar 292) the character of the music changes abruptly, with accented, *staccato martellato* (detached hammered) strikes in the lower strings (figure 3.2) creating a driving force which pushes the music onward under the vocal lines as the Nurse and Old Man, addressing the audience directly, comment on the action taking place around them: 'Thus shall a story begin. A child is born without choice. From its parents alone it lives. As now from its parents it dies.' Shortly thereafter the Young Guard returns to the stage and joins them, and here the Attic choral ode really begins, as here the three choral characters debate the ethics of

³⁷From Tippett's score annotation it is evident that he conceived of the choral role as only consisting of the specific interludes between the scenes of each act. However, as I hope is clear throughout my analysis of the choral function in the opera, this role may legitimately and productively be conceived of much more broadly.

Priam's situation, the Young Guard taking on the role of the naïve but earnest youth, the Old Man the wise and dutiful subject, and the Nurse the patient participant who listens to all others before making her own comment:

Young Guard: That is a crime.

Nurse: Ah.

Old Man: What is a crime?

Young Guard: To kill one's own child is a crime.

Old Man: It may be a duty. Nature has many children for a man. Priam is young and lusty; Hecuba healthy. What means one child when the choice involves the whole city?

Young Guard: How could a young man know enough to dare to make such a choice?

Old Man: After the wise man read the dream, Priam knew all. He made the choice that a King would have to. Husband to Hecuba and King of Troy, how other could he act?

Nurse: There are things left out of your science. I had other apprehensions when the dream was read.

Note that the Old Man refers to the 'wise man' who 'read the dream' – this is in fact his own character, and this phrasing confirms that in this interlude the characters are indeed functioning as the chorus, rather than in their individual roles. This characterisation subtly changes the interpretation of the Nurse's final line here, 'I had other apprehensions when the dream was read', since she is not speaking as herself, rather as a mediating force between drama and audience; this encourages the audience, and for us the engaged, spatial reader, to question their own interpretation of the prophecy.

The Interlude is composed around a ternary structure, and at bar 344, the opening repeated *secco* (dry) strikes return, preceding all three characters singing together to the audience once more, and acknowledging their own choral role: 'Time, time alone will tell. We shall judge from the story. For life is a story from birth to death. Scene will change into scene before you. Time rolling with each scene away. Thus we follow the story.' The Interlude ends with a solo, accompanied only by the left hand of the piano, from the Old Man, which progresses the narrative by explaining

what has happened over the passage of time between the previous scene and the next: ‘And the story of Priam shows that the father King who made the bitter choice to destroy a son, was favoured at first in home and land. Hector grew to a fine lad, and now there are other sons. The city calm and flourishing; occasion for hunting and the arts of peace.’ This last line is followed, however, by a reprise of the driving figure from the Interlude’s opening, suggesting that all may not be as straightforward as it seems, and indicating that though Priam may have been ‘favoured at first’, this situation is unlikely to continue.

In Scene 2, at various points during bars 402-66, the chorus of huntsmen and the orchestra – together and independently – progress the narrative by describing the action during the hunt, and informing Hector of what is happening (for example, figure 3.3). Following the revelation of Paris’ identity during the hunt scene, Priam agonises over whether to allow him to return to Troy, and finally decides to do so even though it may mean his own death. In reply, at bar 738, the Old Man reminds the audience that the prophecy means Troy’s downfall, as well as Priam’s demise, as he asks Priam: ‘Do you speak for Troy as well?’ After Priam’s acknowledgement of this unfortunate consequence, Tippett indicates in the score annotations that the Nurse, Young Guard and Old Man are to resume their explicit choral function for Interlude 2. Here they comment on the injustice of the situation as representative of the unfairness in life in its entirety: ‘Ah, but life is a bitter charade. We go from birth to death. But nothing is plain. Perhaps at the end, a glimmering of sense, a residue of meaning. (We shall see from the story) But on the way there. Ah, life is a bitter charade, without and within, a complex knot that never unties. Tho’ sometimes cut with a rending sound, the orators drowned by a scream of pain.’

400

Picc1

Fl2

Hn (orch)

Tbns

Tba

1st Harp

f *p* *fp* *f* *p*

fp *fp* *f* *p*

f (*una opul voce ad lib.*)

The bull is a way over

405

Picc1

Fl2

Hn (orch)

Tbns

Tba

1st Harp

cuivre sempre *f* *ff* *p*

cuivre sempre *f* *ff* *p*

mf pesante *mf pesante* *p*

mf *p*

there but the hands will hold it.

Figure 3.3: *King Priam* Act I, Scene 2 – bars 400-10

As with the previous Interlude, the final section returns to the function of progressing the narrative, as the passing of time is documented and the backdrop is set for the forthcoming scene, Hector and Andromache's wedding: 'Ah, life is a bitter charade. Now the role will change from boy to youth. (The force that through the green fuse drives the flower.) Body draws body to a destined bed. Yet we act in a dream. Ah, but life is a bitter charade.' Following this last line from the three central choral characters, the larger chorus of wedding guests actively take the mantle of progressing the narrative by commenting themselves on the Young Guard, Old Man and Nurse's preoccupation with the injustice of the situation, 'Oh look there! We could have guessed it. Droning yourself into a coma. Too fussed with meanings and no morals to live from the moment like us. And what you've missed in Troy!'; and emphatically updating the audience on the present situation, 'Yes, Hector's wedding to Andromache. The bride, pure and beautiful in white. Very dignified, every inch a princess. Hector in a green embroidered tunic with golden buckles. The band of young heroes on parade. Hector the bravest of them all. Hector, Troy's champion! Yet a man for a home; a woman's ideal.' In response, the Young Guard (as himself) asks after Paris: 'And how did young Paris take the wedding?' to which two male soloists from within the chorus of wedding guests reply: 'He did not like it at all. The truth is, once they knew they were brothers, Hector and Paris never got on./Upsetting to Priam, but it's only natural.' The Old Man (also as himself) then asks 'And so?', to which the tutti male guests reply 'So Paris has now left Troy scorning his father, and sailed to Greece', followed by the tutti female guests 'Where Menelaus keeps open house at Sparta with his wife.' Revealing the identity of Menelaus' wife, the male guests sing 'Daughter of Zeus', echoed by the female guests, and then all sing together 'Queen Helen', ending as Helen and Paris' Scene 3 love duet commences.

In Scene 3, at bar 1038, we are instructed by the stage directions that ‘Hermes appears as Chorus’.³⁸ He introduces himself as a mediating character, moving between the mortal and immortal realms, and announces that he must deliver a message from Olympus: ‘Divine go-between, that’s who I am: Hermes, the messenger. I run errands for the Gods and Goddesses. I bring a message from Zeus.’ Then in his true choral function, Hermes progresses the narrative, describing the required ‘Judgement of Paris’: ‘To Paris, the most beautiful man alive. You are to choose between three Graces. Athene, Hera, Aphrodite. You shall give this apple to the most beautiful.’

During the first scene of the second act, the offstage chorus sing war cries to emphasise the conflict at the backdrop of the dramatic action (bars 124-9, 149-57 – figure 3.4). These cries function both to progress the narrative, in terms of illustrating the continued presence of the battle underlying the action being foregrounded on stage at any particular point in the scene, and also to comment on that action, by imbuing the reality of the conflict into everything that happens onstage.

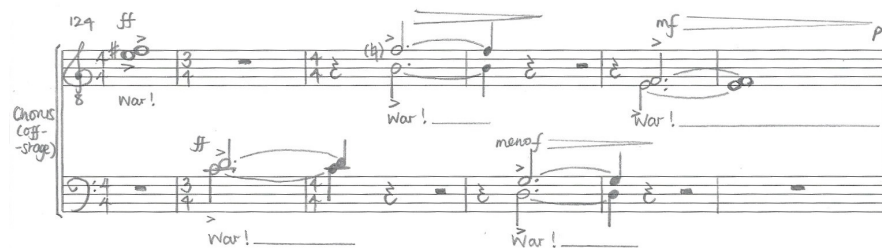


Figure 3.4: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 1 – bars 124-9

The cries, complemented by antiphonal triplet trumpet battle signals between players on and offstage (figure 3.5 – bars 174-6, 194-6, 222-7, 232-8), continue throughout the

³⁸Conversely, however, the annotation above his first line reads ‘(role)’ – this confusion in Tippett’s own instructions lends further weight to my reading of a far broader choral function throughout the work. Cf. Michael Tippett, *King Priam* (London: Schott & Co. Ltd, 2005), 90.

first Interlude of this act (bars 169-71, 196, 217-20, 227-30, and 236-8), as the Old Man asks Hermes to transport him to Achilles' tent in order that he may spy on the Greek hero.



Figure 3.5: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 1 – bars 174-6

After Achilles' central aria 'O rich-soiled land', the offstage war cries continue in Scene 2 (bars 356-8, 366-9, and 397-400), emphasising the inescapable presence of the ongoing battle throughout the dialogue between Achilles and Patroclus, as Patroclus pleads with Achilles to let him enter the battle in his armour. Later, the Old Man and Hermes return to prominence in the next choral ode (Interlude 2), first commenting on the action (in their roles):

Old Man: O what a threat to Troy. Hermes, what's to be done?

Hermes: Why ask me? I am not tied to Troy. The gods rejoice when a hero like Achilles chooses at last to redeem his virtue.

and then progressing the narrative further:

Old Man: I have no life beyond the bounds of Troy. Help from the gods means help for Troy. Return, Hermes, now at once and bring the news to Priam.
 Hermes:³⁹ The messenger is instantaneous when the news is feared. Priam will have guessed. But yet, since you ask, I will go again across the field of battle.

The offstage chorus and trumpets then resume their aural enactment of the ongoing battle, with war cries and antiphonal triplet battle signals to the end of the Interlude (bars 489-510).

At the start of Scene 3, Hermes progresses the narrative again, entering as an unidentified messenger to deliver the news to Priam that Patroclus is fighting in Achilles' armour (bars 515-20), and then that Hector is fighting him (bars 527-33). During Achilles' war cry at the end of the scene, the offstage chorus (now the Greek troops) echo his eruptions in canon, with entries delayed by a bar (bars 621*ff.*). To clarify what is happening for the audience, the Old Man tells us we are hearing 'Achilles' war-cry!' and he laments, indicating the devastating outcome that will play out in the final act, 'O Troy!'

Hector's death is ironically confirmed at the start of the third act, though it has not yet happened, by the chorus of serving women, who ask pointedly: 'Lady Andromache, should we not light the fire?' Later in the scene, they return, furthering the same effect by announcing 'The bath is hot. Will the Lord Hector come?' When Andromache helplessly replies 'Yes, yes', the serving women emphatically correct her, 'No. No. No.' as the first Interlude starts. Here the serving women finally confirm Hector's death in explicit terms, progressing the narrative by delivering the grave news: 'We have it from the runner who has reached the house.' They then reflect on their own role, and the broader role of the unnamed characters, as chorus, articulating their lack of autonomy and emphasizing their narrative and commentarial functions

³⁹At this point Tippett directs that Hermes switches to his choral role.

in a section of Tippett's libretto which poignantly captures the suffering of ordinary people with no control over the conflict to which they are subject, constituting one of the most obvious statements in the opera of his pacifist outlook:

We always know. Yet who are we? Not the names that figure in the drama. Unnamed slaves. (Yes.) Slaves. To whom the fate of towered Troy is but a change of masters. What else? Rape! Death! Are these Greek or Trojan? Yet we could tell the story too, the pathetic story of our masters. Viewed from the corridor.

The musical score for King Priam, Act III, Scene 1, bars 426-8, is presented in five staves. The top staff is for the Chorus (Off-stage), showing three measures of 'Ah!' with a forte (ff) dynamic. The second staff is for Violas (Vlas), the third for Vocals (Vcs), and the fourth and fifth staves are for Double Basses (Dbs). The instrumental parts (Vlas, Vcs, Dbs) show a melodic line with a forte (ff) dynamic in the first measure and a fortissimo (f) dynamic in the second and third measures. The score is marked with '426' and 'ff' at the beginning of the first measure.

Figure 3.6: *King Priam* Act III, Scene 1 – bars 426-8

The serving women's bitter polemic is interrupted in bar 426 by the return of the cries from the offstage chorus, accompanied by the lower strings (figure 3.6), creating a sense of the heightened chaos in the background. The serving women go on to comment directly on this, and progress the narrative, now in the present tense with the effect that the audience is pulled into the action, effectively experiencing it

in real-time with the characters:

All the commotion now. Would you know what that is? News. News of Hector's shocking death spreads like plague through Troy, from the slave to the heroes, Priam's sons, and to the Queen. Only King Priam does not know. For who shall tell him? This news may break his heart or turn his mind. Troy will crumble. Who will tell him as he rages, rages in an inner room? Look! There! He comes.

Two final cries from the offstage chorus, with lower strings, bring the Interlude to its end, leading straight into the following scene, in which they reprise fragmented echoes of Achilles' war cry (bars 479-80), signaling that Achilles is responsible for the terror which Priam senses, but does not yet know.

During Scene 2, the chorus takes on a new role *within* the drama, as they help Priam to come to terms with what is happening in the narrative; this constitutes his central moment of *anagnôrisis*, and represents the launch point for the prolonged build up to the opera's great transcendent climax. In this capacity, the chorus act as mediator between Priam as a spatial reader, and the events of his own narrative life. Here, perhaps, the chorus might be seen more as modernist, than Greek. After Priam realizes the devastating consequence of Paris' prophecy (i.e. Hector's death), and states that had he known this, he would have killed Paris in the cradle, the Young Guard and Old Man enter, reprising their earlier choral reflection on the ethics of Priam's choice: 'A crime./A duty.' Hearing their words, Priam refers to them as 'Phantoms from the fatal hour', and asks 'Is not the present harsh enough that you should come to mock me from the past?' demonstrating the appositeness of the spatial paradigm in which these moments are viewed in parallel, and everything is always already known. Next, the Young Guard, and later the Old Man, prompt Priam to reflect on his relationship with Paris, encouraging him to reconsider his actions and facilitating his realization of the futility of conflict and revenge:

Young Guard: Think on the present then. What have you done to your son, Paris, now?
 Priam: I have no son, Paris. I had a son, Hector. But he is dead. O Gods.
 Young Guard: You engendered Paris. That cannot be shuffled off.
 Priam: Let him avenge his brother then.
 Young Guard: What is this vengeance? Recount. Who killed Patroclus?
 Priam: Great Hector, defending the city.
 Young Guard: Who avenged Patroclus, killing Hector?
 Priam: Barbaric Achilles. Curse him!
 Young Guard: Who kills Achilles?
 Priam: Paris, my son.
 Young Guard: Who will kill Paris?
 Priam: O Gods!
 Old Man and Chorus (offstage): Agamemnon. Agamemnon.
 Young Guard: What then is this vengeance that you want?

In his grief and disbelief, Priam mistakenly thinks that the prophecy was misinterpreted by the Old Man, and that allowing Paris to live caused Hector's death *instead* of his own. Showing Priam the truth, the Old Man corrects him: 'No. No. I told you truth so far I knew it.' In despair, Priam repeatedly asks 'Why?' and he is guided towards understanding through dialogue with the Nurse:

Nurse: The Soul will answer from where the pain is quickest.
 Priam: Where the pain is quickest. O Hector, my son, my son.
 Nurse: Where did Hector's death begin?
 Priam: Where did Hector's death begin? Not at conception, for I loved my wife and loved my child. His death began at that fatal flaw of pity that you [here he points to the Young Guard] sensed in me. I should have been hard like Hecuba. Like this old man. Then Hector would be here.
 Nurse: One son to live only by another's death. Is that the law of life you favour?
 Priam: I favour nothing. But I answer: Yes. Yes. Yes.
 Nurse: Listen to your soul's echo.
 Chorus (offstage): No. No. No.

Priam continues to despair, having simultaneously realized his own responsibility for Hector's death, and re-experienced the impossibility of the choice with which he was faced. He curses his own soul, and the 'phantoms' (the choral characters who are mediating his realization of the truth) and sinks to the ground in submission to his fate. The scene closes with the three choral characters confirming Priam's tortured state, and showing him pity:

Young Guard and Old Man: Lie there and judge yourself, father and King!
 Nurse: Measure him time with mercy.

The second Interlude in Act III is purely orchestral. The bass clarinet, bassoon, cellos and double basses re-emphasize Priam's grief and devastation with a series of murky descending intervals, played *pianissimo*, *sotto voce*. After ten bars, there is a crescendo preparing two percussive horn entries which sound over a dramatic raising of the cello and double bass tessitura (bars 789-90). This precedes six bars of (traditionally feminine) lamentation with octave unison in the violas, cellos and double basses, prolonging a pedal on G with intermittent drops down and leaps back up (figure 3.7).



Figure 3.7: *King Priam* Act III, Interlude 2 – bars 791-6

The next section of the Interlude summarizes the overarching conflict in the opera between public and private spheres, represented by Priam's mutually exclusive duties as a King (depicted with militaristic brass) and a father (the domestic sphere illustrated with strings). For five bars, these two discrete worlds sound against each other in turn in clashing Monteverdian antiphony (figure 3.8), before a fleeting

momentary silence disrupts their conflict, and the music turns, *subito pianissimo*, to the violins and violas, with a light flurrying, ascending figure which is played twice before the final ascent to the very top of the instruments' range, joined by the flutes, as 'a point of light appears on the stage', and the Interlude ends, having established that Priam's moment of transcendence is now possible.

The musical score for King Priam Act III, Interlude 2, bars 797-801, is presented in a standard orchestral format. It includes parts for Flutes (Hns), Trumpets (Tpts), Trombones (Tbns), Violins (Vlins), Violas (Vlas), and Cellos (Vcs). The music is in 7/8 time and features a light, flurrying ascending figure in the strings, followed by a final ascent to the top of the instruments' range, joined by the flutes. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *ff*, and *(f)*, and articulation markings like *gliss.* and *sim.*

Figure 3.8: *King Priam* Act III, Interlude 2 – bars 797-801

Interlude 3 consists of Hermes' 'Hymn to Music', for which he is described in the score annotations as 'a messenger of death', and performs an established choral function in alerting the audience that the end of the story is near, and prefiguring Priam's death.

In Scene 4, the offstage chorus resume their desolate cries, with snare drum interjections and accompaniment from Hecuba's violins, reminding the audience of the chaotic backdrop to the personal tragedy playing out with Hecuba and Paris

onstage (bars 1119-21, 1168-70 – figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9: *King Priam* Act III, Scene 4 – bars 1119-21

After Hecuba exits, and Andromache enters, the chorus reprise this role, with a variant on their previous cry motif, now accompanied by Andromache's cellos (bars 1174-9, 1192-4 – figure 3.10).

Finally, the cry is varied again for Helen, with violins, violas, cellos and double basses in accompaniment (figure 3.11). After Paris finally leaves to meet his own death, the offstage chorus signal the renewed intensity of the conflict with yet another variant on their cries (figure 3.12); this version is repeated and extended as Priam asks 'Why was that I wonder? Why do I speak gently now below the screams of the dying?' doubled by the cellos (figure 3.13).

1174 f marc. p angustiato f f p f

Chorus (off-stage)

Vcs

f appassionato

Ah, ha, ha, ha ah ah ah Ah, ha, ha, ha ah ah ah

Figure 3.10: *King Priam* Act III, Scene 4 – bars 1174-9

1207 poco f dim. (p)

Chorus (off-stage)

Vlns

Vlas

Vcs

Db

pizz marc. f p

Ah, ah, ah Ah, ah, ah

Figure 3.11: *King Priam* Act III, Scene 4 – bars 1207-10

1255 *ff con forza*

Ah! ah

ff con forza

Ah! ah

ff con forza

Ah! ah, ah

ff con forza

Ah

ff con forza

Ah

Chorus
(off-
stage)

Figure 3.12: *King Priam* Act III, Scene 4 – bars 1255-7

Figure 3.13: *King Priam* Act III, Scene 4 – bars 1273-80

At the moment when Priam confirms Paris' death to Helen, the chorus repeat their cry again (bars 1290-2), and they then continue, growing in intensity,⁴⁰ as Priam and Helen's dialogue propounds a strongly feminist statement about the disempowerment of women – far from being a powerful queen, the most beautiful woman in the world, is defined as just that, a woman to be objectified and dominated by her male companions (bars 1293-1306):

Priam: You will go back to Greece.

Helen: Yes.

Priam: For you are Helen.

Priam then kisses her before she leaves. It is not clear from the score how this moment should be staged. The 2014 English Touring Opera production at the Royal Opera House presented the kiss as a moment of desperate passion on Priam's part, inflecting his final line here with the sense that the status quo must be accepted; the kiss was simply another example of Helen's subjugation by a powerful man. My own interpretation is rather different. Given the transformative process which Priam has just undergone in realizing the futility of conflict, and of his own actions, and his evident resignation to his own death, the fact that Helen is the only woman whose presence he will admit in his chamber of despair and self-loathing may be interpreted as acknowledgement that he is just as powerless to control his own fate as she is. This sense of affinity imbues the kiss with a sense of pity, empathy and comfort, and inflects Priam's final words to Helen with sadness and impotence. As Priam weakens and finally accepts his own imminent death, he 'sinks down before the altar and tries to say something, but cannot be heard', and the offstage chorus continue

⁴⁰These cries in particular are strongly reminiscent of the 'General Dance' in D major from Borodin's 'Polotskian Dances' in *Prince Igor* (1869-87), particularly with regard to the repeated build up to climax points, as the chorus sing 'Honneur au Khan, au chef puissant, Ah! Qu'il soit vaillant, toujours plus grand, Ah! Gloire au Khan, Ah! Gloire au Khan, Ah!'

their discordant cries, with cluster chords of G, F \sharp , D and E; A, G \sharp , E and F \sharp ; G, G \sharp , E and A; and B, E, A and G \sharp . In a break with the tradition of Attic tragedy, in which death scenes were characteristically absent from the stage action, and were instead reported – usually in graphic detail – by a messenger figure after the event, Priam's death in the final bars of the opera is shown onstage, with only orchestral accompaniment.

This extended explication of the manner in which Tippett's music mandates his reader to become a 'witness to and participant in the act of theatre' highlights the crucial mediating role of the *choros* in guiding the reader into and out of specific narrative moments by both opening these events up for the reader's participative engagement, and drawing their attention to particular points of perspective within the interpretative space in which they interact with the opera's somewhat transient hermeneutic content. What remains at this point is to examine the possible shape of that hermeneutic content, in so much as it is formed in part by the narrative themes and extra-musical contexts at play in the work, the potential which each individual will realize in their own unique way.

3.4 Conflict as Theme and Meta-theme

3.4.1 *King Priam's Ubiquitous Question*

Overarching themes may be identified between the typical narrative programmes of fifth-century Athenian tragedy, particularly the perennial presence of conflict. This appears in various divergent guises, though most often in the form of armed war between the 'home' society and an Otherized foreign body. Burian describes war as

‘the starting-point of all storytelling’,⁴¹ and Edith Hall refers to it as ‘the omnipresent background of tragedy as it was a nearly continuous fact of Athenian life’.⁴² For Tippett too, of course, war had been a nearly continuous fact of life: he lived through the Great War as a schoolboy, and the Second World War and Cold War as an adult, the latter conflict penetrating the foreground of European consciousness during *King Priam*’s composition. Nor has armed conflict ceased to be part of everyday reality for the generations of readers since 1962. Certainly, the character of war continues to change and develop, but the fact remains that it is an unfortunate and continual presence in global society.

While *King Priam* is most definitely an opera, Britten’s *War Requiem* is presented rather as a sort of oratorio, to be performed not on the stage, but in a concert-hall or religious context. Closer study of the music however, reveals the dramatic undertones of the work,⁴³ and Mervyn Cooke suggests that Britten’s priority in composing the piece was to convey a social message, rather than simply to add to the corpus of church music: ‘There can be little doubt that his interest in the Requiem text sprang more from an awareness of its dramatic possibilities than from a keen interest in liturgical observance.’⁴⁴ The didacticism of *War Requiem* is inescapable and arguably far more direct than that of *King Priam*, perhaps because it is not a stage work and thus Britten’s hard-hitting arraignment of armed conflict is concentrated through immutable aural realisation, rather than spread between aural and visual elements. Both works open their audiences’ minds to potentially distressing social questions; the

⁴¹Burian, ‘Myth into *muthos*’, 181.

⁴²Hall, ‘The sociology of Athenian tragedy’, 97-8.

⁴³In this respect the *War Requiem* is strikingly similar to Verdi’s *Requiem*, which features a quasi-operatic and (somewhat terrifying) brass-dominated *Dies irae*.

⁴⁴Cooke, *Britten: War Requiem*, 49.

tragedy of *King Priam*'s fictional narrative is thrust upon *War Requiem* audiences in an unmediated form, directly recalling conflicts which are likely to have impacted upon each individual listening to the music. Mitchell writes:

The ideal performance of *War Requiem* should achieve [...] an unmediated⁴⁵ confrontation with the horror, terror and pity of war. The disruptive interruptions, interjections and interpolations should be heard to question – contradict, even – the 'culture' that the setting of the Latin text of the Requiem represents; or at the very least to question the values that seemingly permit a conciliation between mutually exclusive agenda, a traditional affirmation of civilisation and system of belief versus the actuality of barbarity.⁴⁶

Britten's critique of warfare as the primary tool for policing international relations is laid bare in his *War Requiem*, whereas Tippett's commentary on conflict, while still a fundamental aspect of *King Priam*, is not so explicitly foregrounded, mandating the reader's active engagement in order for it fully to be revealed. Tippett's beliefs are offered in a more suggestive manner, and consequently the reader's discernment of this interpretative possibility depends to a greater degree on the nature of their own experience and engagement with the work.

With respect to ostensible subject matter, armed conflict is the primary point of confluence between the two works, yet they also share a more intimate concern with the clash between the public and private spheres of existence experienced by all individuals. Mitchell writes of Britten's *War Requiem* as the paradigmatic example of the composer's lifelong imperative to grapple with and condemn the inescapable violence of modern reality. *War Requiem* can be seen as the culmination of over thirty years of musical explorations on this idea: 'The sheer scale of *War Requiem*

⁴⁵I would assert that a truly 'unmediated confrontation with the horror, terror and pity of war' is not in fact possible, unless one is directly involved in such a conflict; for the purpose at hand I interpret Mitchell's use of 'unmediated' to indicate a direct, raw engagement.

⁴⁶Donald Mitchell, 'Violent Climates', *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, ed. Mervyn Cooke (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 207-8.

marks it out as something special, a scale that reflects the comprehensiveness with which Britten brought into play all the signs, images and sonorities that he had developed since the 1930s to represent the idea of violence.⁴⁷ Only Tippett, according to Mitchell, is truly comparable with Britten in this respect, and I contend that *King Priam* ought to stand alongside *A Child of Our Time* as a further example of a musical elaboration of the two composers' shared beliefs and convictions. Testament to the affinity he felt with Britten is provided by Tippett's identification of *War Requiem* as 'the one musical masterwork we possess with over pacifist meanings',⁴⁸ perhaps we might therefore view *King Priam* as a salutary homage to Britten's lifelong commitment to a 'consistent indictment of violence, its causes and its consequences'.⁴⁹ A similarly pervasive theme throughout Britten's dramatic oeuvre is the tension between public and private concerns – as depicted in *Billy Budd*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Gloriana*, and *Death in Venice*, for example – something which is also implicit in *War Requiem* in the contrast between the collective, communal ritual enacted in the Latin mass, and the stinging reminder of the isolation of individual suffering and sacrifice depicted in Owen's poetry. As will have become clear by the closing stages of this chapter, *King Priam* too draws on the struggle between public responsibilities and the demands of personal relationships, both within and outside of the direct context of war.

Although the tragic plots of Athenian drama are also inflected with smaller-scale conflicts arising from domestic issues, family life and relationships, there is a pervasive sense of extremity, perhaps even melodrama, which characterizes tragic

⁴⁷Mitchell, 'Violent Climates', 206.

⁴⁸Michael Tippett, [Obituary of Britten], *Pacifist* 15/3 (1977) – Tippett's brief obituary of Britten was printed on the front cover of the journal.

⁴⁹Mitchell, 'Violent Climates', 211.

conflict. *King Priam* provides a comparable quantity of examples of such conflict: Priam's own internal struggle when he must choose whether to expose Paris in the very first scene; the fraternal tensions between Hector and Paris described by the chorus at Hector and Andromache's wedding; the animosity shown to Paris by Hera and Athene when he chooses to give Aphrodite the golden apple; the background of the war between the Greek and Trojan armies which results from the dispute between Paris and Menelaus over Helen; and the seemingly eternal struggle against fate and the will of the gods faced by the mortal characters. The dimension of extremity is created by the knowledge that the choices faced by the characters at decisive moments in the narrative have unimaginable, far-reaching and potentially devastating consequences, which under the spatial paradigm are always already evident, heightening their impact. What may appear as a simple choice in a domestic setting is actually anything but, and will inevitably impact not only upon those directly involved, but a far broader *demos*, as Burian observes: 'conflict in tragedy is never limited to the opposition of individuals; the future of the royal house, the welfare of the community, even the ordering of human life itself may be at stake.'⁵⁰

Tippett himself offers an explicative complication of his choice of subject matter for *King Priam*. He dismisses the specific technicalities of the conflict at the centre of the opera, and asserts that what is important is the *presence* of the war, which overshadows and affects everything that happens in the lives of the protagonists.⁵¹

⁵⁰Burian, 'Myth into *muthos*', 182.

⁵¹Tippett was an admirer of Schiller, who adopts a similar approach for *Wilhelm Tell* (1804). Very little actual war or revolutionary action is staged, but armed conflict remains the primary focus of the characters' interest, and stands as a constant backdrop to their interactions. I am very grateful to Michael Graham for the observation of the stark contrast between such staged drama (such as *Wilhelm Tell* and *King Priam*) and Hollywood blockbusters (such as *Troy*), which usually foreground the elaborate spectacle and violence of war as opposed to the more intimate experience of the characters and their associated feelings.

The opera is not concerned with the causes, real or legendary, of the Trojan War, nor with the military fortunes of the Greeks and Trojans. Much other material of the great legend has also to be rejected, however operatically tempting [...] The war therefore appears in the opera as inevitable; as inescapable as Helen and Paris' love. That is to say, it belongs to the way of life of fighting men; perhaps, finally, in some altered form, of all men always. There is no description of the war, there are just the necessary formal musical gestures.⁵²

In this way the opera becomes relevant to 'all men [and women] always', yet crucially, the war's all-pervading presence within the work is conveyed not by linguistic or dramatic means, but principally through Tippett's music. Puffett comments that 'in *King Priam* one is struck by the extent to which the music derives its power from the power of the myth' and refers to 'a whole repertoire of stark thematic gestures [...] on which the operatic characterisation, and with it the power of the opera to move, depend'.⁵³ Clearly, then, a truly collaborative relationship exists between the music and the ideas which it was composed to convey. The music depicts the backdrop of the Trojan War, with all its associated corollaries, but it is the synthesis of these ideas with their musical setting which has an emotional effect on the audience, compelling their engagement with the work and thereby their simultaneous creation and perception of meaning within it. A recurring feature of the musical illustration of the overarching presence of war in the opera's narrative is vocal cries sung by the offstage chorus – cries of battle, terror, pity, or despair.⁵⁴

⁵²Tippett, 'The Resonance of Troy', 214.

⁵³Puffett, 'Tippett and the Retreat from Mythology', 10.

⁵⁴For a detailed charting of these cries, see section 3.3.2 on *King Priam's choros*, above. The 2014 English Touring Opera production of the opera at the ROH staged some of these choral cries with characters onstage. To me, this was a disappointing choice. While foregrounding the battle, and communicating the fighting more directly to the audience, visually staging these cries altered their status within the scene, transforming them from immutable aural signifiers of the overarching conflict to transient, locatable – and therefore assimilable – embodied outbursts, and drawing almost too much attention to the events of the war, away from the personal conflicts at the heart of the opera's narrative, and with which the spatial reader should be compelled to engage in order to interpret the work's meaning.

King Priam is, above all, an epic tragedy. This condition, proposed by the originating literary sources and affirmed through the opera's musical language, is central not only to the work's general character, but also to the essence of the profound problematization of conflict it is possible to interpret in the work, particularly given the political situation at the moment of the work's genesis, elongated though this moment was. Achilles' war cry, intoned during the final twenty-two bars of Act II at the end of the male ensemble 'All Trojans, all fought bravely', is perhaps the most obvious example of the opera's epic musico-dramatic gestures, and stands apart as a distinctly different type of cry to those delivered by the offstage chorus throughout the rest of the opera. His wordless utterances are set in three blocks separated by short enunciations from Priam and the Old Man which express their growing realisation of the impact of Patroclus' death on Achilles and on the fortunes of the Trojans in the immediate future of the conflict, as the story catches up with the plot in this particular aspect of the narrative.

Achilles' first cry is preceded by Hector, Paris and Priam celebrating, and perhaps even gloating (as suggested by the stage directions), over the death of Achilles' closest companion. The war cry is dovetailed with the final bar of this trio, neatly illustrating that Achilles' anger and desire to return to the battle are a direct result of Hector's actions. The final beat of this first bar of the cry is completely unaccompanied, with accents on the half beats to further ensure that the sound penetrates. The cries themselves, labelled *barbaro marcatissimo* (very aggressively marked), feature rapid syllabic declamation on semiquavers and triplet quavers, articulated with staccato and accents and following a pitch contour which rises over the majority of the phrase, before falling again in the final bar (figure 3.14). Achilles is echoed by the offstage chorus who imitate his cries in a three-part canon

Figure 3.14: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 3 – bars 621-4

with entries a bar apart, and Tippett's notes on the score indicate that these *forte* notes are to be further amplified by megaphones, or other such equipment. The high woodwind, trumpet, horn and piano accompaniment consists of fragmented rising melodic lines, atrophied with trills and punctuated by the percussion to give a distressed effect which grows in intensity as the pitch of the instrumental lines rises and dynamic variances bring different individual instruments momentarily to the foreground of audibility (figure 3.15).

Figure 3.15: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 3 – bars 623-4

This first cry is brought to a climax as Achilles, the chorus and their clamouring

accompaniment are abruptly cut off by two sustained chords in the lower woodwind, piano and percussion, followed by a foreboding fanfare pedal in the horns and trombone (figure 3.16).

The musical score for King Priam Act II, Scene 3, bars 625-7, is a full orchestral score. It includes parts for B.C. (Bass Clarinet), Bsn (Bass Saxophone), Cbsn (Contrabass Saxophone), Hns (Horn), Tbn (Trombone), Tba (Tuba), and Pno (Piano). The music is in 2/4 time and features a fanfare pedal in the horns and trombone, followed by a foreboding fanfare pedal in the horns and trombone. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *pp sub.*, and *ff*, and articulation markings such as *pesante minacciante* and *più f*.

Figure 3.16: *King Priam* Act II, Scene 3 – bars 625-7

Against this warning, the Old Man confirms to both the characters onstage and the audience that what they have just heard is in fact ‘Achilles’ war-cry!’ and almost immediately, the Greek hero begins again, *fortissimo* over the final chords of the fanfare. This second cry is one bar longer, covering a greater pitch range, but is accompanied by both chorus and instruments in much the same manner as the first. As before it ends abruptly with chords and fanfare, and this time Priam laments ‘O

Hector!’, and the Old Man, ‘Oh Troy!’, before Achilles begins again for the third and final time. His final cry is extended by a further bar, accompanied as before, and yet the great climax toward which the music seems to have been building throughout this section never arrives. Instead, both voices and accompaniment simply cease with the ‘quick curtain’, leaving the threat of Achilles and a renewed Greek effort hanging over Troy.

3.4.2 Mediation of Binaries

Crucially important is the presence of the ‘Other’, whether this distinction is drawn on grounds of nationality, gender, age, social class or mortal status, as the second protagonist with whom conflict is enacted. Edith Hall comments on the ostensible paradox between the real-life performance setting of tragic drama in fifth-century Athens and the internal setting of the dramatic action:

Although profoundly concerned with the Athenian’s public, collective, identity as a citizen, tragedy came to be set not in the male arenas of civic discourse – the council, assembly or lawcourts – but in the marginal space immediately outside the door of the private home. The action takes place at the exact physical point where the veil is torn from the face of domestic crises, revealing them to public view, and disclosing their ramifications not only for the central figures but also for the wider community.⁵⁵

The latter half of this summary encapsulates perfectly the parallel binarisms of public and private and male and female as mapped in *King Priam*: the opera’s events play out for the most part within Troy’s walls, and the familial traumas arising from Paris’ prophecy, his disputes with Hector, and his love affair with Helen are played out to public display, their social consequences becoming increasingly evident both to the other characters onstage and to the opera’s audience. Hall’s assertion of tragedy’s

⁵⁵Hall, ‘The sociology of Athenian tragedy’, 104.

associations with social participation and identification with the collective ties in with Tippet's well-documented affinity for Jung's theory of the collective unconscious.

Tippet's central concern in *King Priam*, 'the mysterious nature of human choice', is perfectly attuned to another characteristic tenet of Athenian tragedy – the presence of fate and the associated interference by the immortal inhabitants of Mount Olympus in the lives of the human, earth-bound characters. Divine intervention in Greek tragic drama does not carry the modern-day connotations of salvation and good fortune, the *deus ex machina* of the sanitized fairy tale. Instead, the gods impose their will on the lives of their mortal subjects, whether directly or more subtly through the construction of circumstances and events which demand a certain course of action. There is a certain sense of circularity as the consequences and aftermath of past events and actions impact inescapably on present and future happenings. The characterization of the Greek deities constitutes a personification of that which we cannot rationalize, explain, or understand, designed to mediate this unknown entity and allow us to accept its existence.

It is interesting to consider the extent to which members of the Athenian audience actively engaged, and were thereby able to identify, with the events of tragic dramatic narratives. As discussed previously, Greek tragic plays were almost always concerned with the suffering of kings, and thus we might wonder whether ordinary citizens were able to empathise with their plights in any significant manner. Edith Hall suggests that the relatively recently acquired freedom and autonomy of the Athenian citizen allowed him to '[see] himself in some sense as a "monarch"', and thus perhaps identify with the central characters of tragic drama.⁵⁶ Cartledge,

⁵⁶Hall, 'The sociology of Athenian tragedy', 98.

however, disagrees, stating that ‘it would have been hard for the average citizen, however strongly he might have considered himself to be a lineal descendant, morally speaking, of the noble Homeric heroes, to identify himself with these larger-than-life characters.’⁵⁷ While the elevated status within the social hierarchy of tragedy’s most prominent personages may have precluded the development of an obvious sense of affinity amongst Athenian audiences, and had a similar effect with regard to Tippet’s audiences thousands of years later, it is important to remember that tragic plots, including that of *King Priam* centre around everyday, real life issues. While many might reply to the question ‘What is *King Priam* about?’ with the answer ‘The Trojan War’, it does not take a particularly far-reaching investigation beneath the surface to demonstrate that this most public of conflicts has arisen from a series of domestic crises. For Aristotle, it is crucial that the fear elicited by tragedy ‘entails an implicit awareness that *we too* could be exposed to similar sufferings’,⁵⁸ that is, that our active engagement is mandated, even compelled, by the materials with which we are presented. As Edith Hall points out, ‘tragedy cannot be used as a document of the realities of life in Athens’; indeed, in real life the events described in *King Priam* do not accurately depict twentieth-century British society, however, the work does stand as a contemporary equivalent in testimony to what Hall describes as ‘the social and emotional preoccupations [... of the] Athenians’ collective thought-world.’⁵⁹

So how might we understand this collective thought-world? Taking direction from Tippet’s own philosophical and political preoccupations, perhaps we might tender a suggestion of a chain of thinking launched from Marxism, and developed

⁵⁷Cartledge, “‘Deep plays’”, 17.

⁵⁸Halliwell, *The ‘Poetics’ of Aristotle*, 91.

⁵⁹Hall, ‘The sociology of Athenian tragedy’, 99-100.

through Jungian and Žižekian thought. Central to Marxist theory is the concept of two entities – the capitalist and the worker – whose identities are fixed and mediated by the capitalist model of production and exchange. This concept may in turn be mediated and interpreted through an application of Jungian theory, facilitating a reading of archetypes as the providers of ideological fantasies at the cultural level which support the mystification of the relations of production encoded in the binary of the capitalist and the worker. A common interpretation of *King Priam* reads a strong critique of Communist ideology in the work, shaped by Tippett's own promulgation of this capitalist-worker binary, mediated through the Jungian psychology with which he so strongly identified. In order not only properly to understand the enduring relevance of Tippett's socio-political commentary, but also to understand our own engagement with the text and thereby our own construction of meaning within it, we must adopt what Slavoj Žižek refers to as the 'standard Marxist procedure' and attempt to 'discern in the assertion of some abstract Universal the particular content that hegemonises it.'⁶⁰ At the macro-analytical level, identifying the specific underlying premises which dominated Tippett's intellectual, artistic and political worldview at the moment of *King Priam*'s construction facilitates a plethora of plausible readings which are relevant to twenty-first century audiences, while retaining a connection to the original context of the work's composition.

Puffett suggests that Peter Brook's encouragement for Tippett to 'choose a public myth and not a private one' was not simply motivated by an acute awareness of an audience's need to be able to follow a stage work, but specifically that he felt that 'without the stabilising force of a mythological subject, Tippett's work was likely

⁶⁰Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute (Or why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for?)* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 91.

to go off into a fantasy world of eccentricity'.⁶¹ While pragmatically accurate, this sort of commentary is an uncomfortable reminder of the prevailing creative climate during much of the preceding century, in which the British composer had to 'convince his generally unwilling audience that there is any validity in what he does', and the resulting 'desire on the part of the artist to make his work "relevant" and marry his ideas with the monumental, the easily-to-be-grasped-important-for-us-all message'.⁶² As Alexander Goehr asserts, however, such a compositional imperative is acceptable when the composer's ideas result naturally in manifestations of a common humanity, as Tippett's undeniably do. There is another issue to be raised here – the assumption of a general condition of ignorance amongst those who would have made up the opera's first audiences. It may be patronizing, perhaps even insulting, to imply that while audiences can follow a relatively simple and well-rehearsed fable, they flounder with one that is more complex (as a result of its 'personal' nature) and unfamiliar, if that narrative is conveyed via the medium of music.

3.4.3 Subversion and Problematization of Gender

One particular type of binary problematized through the opera's dramatic and musical characterization relates to gender – conceptualizations of male/female, and masculine/feminine. Cartledge describes the conventional gender roles in fifth-century Athenian culture thus:

The true site for the display of Greek manhood and masculine prowess was always the battlefield, the ancient Greek term for pugnacious bravery being precisely 'manliness' (*andreia*). War was to a Greek man, it has been justly remarked, what marriage was to a Greek woman: in each sphere they respectively fulfilled what their culture

⁶¹Puffett, 'Tippett and the Retreat from Mythology', 10.

⁶²Alexander Goehr, 'Tippett at Sixty', *The Musical Times* 106/1463 (1965), 22.

deemed to be their essential natures.⁶³

The central pre-occupations of *King Priam*'s male characters, particularly Priam himself, Hector and Achilles, relate to war and vengeance, while their female counterparts, Hecuba, Andromache and Helen, are concerned with domestic issues, love and family life. As already demonstrated, Paris appears in this context somewhat androgynous, since at times he is eager to join the young men of Troy at the games and in defence of their city, whilst at other crucial moments he prioritises love and lust over duty. Tippett's music helps to illustrate these gender-inflected perspectives on Paris' character.

On the second level of the spatial analytical framework, a comparison of the instrumental writing in the first two scenes of the final act highlights both the opera's homogeneous sonic style and Tippett's pairing of specific instruments or instrument families with specific characters and indeed genders, a technique whose use here draws *King Priam* into dialogue with several of its paratexts – one only has to look to almost any Wagnerian music-drama, or to twentieth-century works such as Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* and Hans Werner Henze's *Elegy for Young Lovers* for examples of similar representational technique. Act III, Scene 1 features only female characters – Andromache, Hecuba, Helen, the Nurse, and the chorus of Serving Women – and, with the exception of the side and bass drums, only stringed instruments (including the piano and harp). Throughout the opera, the strings are associated with female characters to such an extent that they clearly represent the idea of femininity (this is most obviously evident in Act II, which features no female characters, and no strings); the only exceptions to this characterization carry unfortunate implications – the use of

⁶³Cartledge, "“Deep plays”", 13.

strings to accompany Paris as a young boy (Act I, Scene 2), suggests that women are essentially children,⁶⁴ and his string accompaniment at the end of his love duet with Helen (Act I, Scene 3) where he contemplates the ramifications of his choice to leave Sparta taking Helen with him, suggests that Paris is acting with the selfishness, lust, and irrationality, but also the lack of true agency, traditionally ascribed to women (he asks, 'Is there a choice at all?').

Within this broader pairing, Hecuba is almost always accompanied by violins, Andromache by cellos and double basses, and Helen by violas, harp and piano. Only when the women sing together are the instruments combined, but even in sections of music such as the trio 'O that my ears should hear impiety so gross!' the individual instrumental lines retain their own independent character, and are audibly distinguishable from the overall texture, illustrating the strongly independent and frequently clashing natures of the three characters. An immediately obvious example of this contrast can be heard in Act III, Scene 2, where the men Priam, Paris, the Young Guard, the Old Man and the male chorus, are accompanied by woodwinds, brass and timpani. Interestingly, as Priam expresses his anger and grief at Hector's death, blaming Paris and rejecting him once more as his son, the strings return to the texture. Given Tippett's meticulous gendering of instrumental timbre, the unavoidable implication is that Paris has acted with a negatively feminine-gendered emotional volatility and irresponsibility, and that Priam is likewise adopting a traditionally 'female' role in mourning Hector's death. This association is particularly emphasised by his lamentations at the start.

The representation of gender and the relationship between the biologically

⁶⁴Another interesting point of confluence with Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, which there is sadly no space to pursue further here.

male and female and genders of masculine and feminine is a prominent feature of Athenian tragic drama. Simon Goldhill refers to the ‘explicit discussion of gender issues’ staged in many tragedies,⁶⁵ and *King Priam* presents a plethora of both affirmations and subversions of traditionally conceived gender roles, calling attention to their performative, social construction through explicit musical representation. The work stands in a position of relative isolation from its predecessor and successor operas: musically it illustrates a strikingly different soundworld to that of *The Midsummer Marriage*, and in terms of its social commentary it is in some ways much more guarded and impersonal than *The Knot Garden*. Despite these differences, an interrogation of the opera’s male characters illuminates a varied range of masculinities, one of which has a direct pre-cursor in *The Midsummer Marriage*, and others of which are echoed and developed in *The Knot Garden*. The four central male characters – Priam, Hector, Paris and Achilles – embody, and in some cases subvert, distinct tropes of masculinity; one potential interpretation of Tippett’s musical portrayal of such a catalogue of masculinities through these characters reads Tippett’s deliberate choice of the Trojan War mythology for the opera’s foundation as a seized opportunity to couch his burgeoning ideas and personal feelings about masculinity, maleness, and sexuality in a quasi-fictional narrative whose native contextual interpretation would to some extent act as a protective barrier in a post-war society in which such issues were violently controversial.

Hector, Priam’s eldest son, embodies a stereotypical masculine identity – the Romantic hero: strong, honourable, healthy and virile; the progenitor of a son; and a seasoned warrior – patriotic, loyal, and ready to sacrifice his own life in battle. Of the

⁶⁵Simon Goldhill, ‘Modern critical approaches to Greek Tragedy’, *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, 345.

four central male characters, his gender identity is cast with the greatest degree of simplicity: it is established in the narrated history of Priam's kingship immediately prior to Hector's first appearance, confirmed by the overtly masculine hunting scene which follows and maintained, never wavering or called into question, to his death at the hands of a vengeful Achilles just before the final act. Hector is sung by a baritone, and his music (scored primarily for woodwind, brass and percussion) is imbued with a weighty authority. In light of the following discussion of characters whose expression of stereotypical masculinity is not so straightforward, Hector might be viewed as a benchmark to which the others will inevitably, though perhaps not desirably, be compared.

Like King Fisher in *The Midsummer Marriage*, Priam's masculine identity undergoes a dramatic transformation, perhaps even disfigurement, during the course of the opera. He is established at the outset as a typical alpha male – he is the King, his city is prosperous and successful, he directs a powerful military force, and he is married and has conceived sons.⁶⁶ From the first scene however, we are made acutely aware that Priam is destined to lose his power and control (attributes which confirm his stereotypical masculinity), since he is unable to kill his baby son Paris, who has been prophesied to cause his death and the fall of Troy. One might locate this incapacity within a more effeminate element of Priam's character – the emotion-ridden, protective instinct typically characteristic of maternal figures. Over the course of the opera, it becomes increasingly evident that Priam will die, and in the penultimate scene, we see him reduced to begging for Achilles to release

⁶⁶In fact, wider knowledge of the mythology heightens this image, since in Book VI of the *Iliad* (the main literary paratext in relation to the mythology) we are told that Priam has fifty sons and many daughters by various wives and concubines.

Hector's mutilated body, having accepted his own impending end. At this moment he is accompanied by the lower strings, hitherto used to characterise and illustrate the female characters, and Achilles' familiar guitar accompaniment gives way to militaristic brass and woodwind figures; here Priam is supplicating to Achilles, he is subordinate to him, and subject to his will – in a reversal of their previous characterisations, Achilles is now the powerful patriarch, while Priam is an effeminate shadow of his former kingly self. A comparison of Tippett's music for Priam at the beginning and end of the opera signals his decline inescapably clearly in aural terms. In the final bars of the opera, Priam's military-style brass and woodwind music is claimed by a frenzied Neoptolemus, and the strings, which have been used throughout the opera closely to characterise the individual female characters, now intrude on and conquer this previously unequivocally masculine musical space.

Paris first appears in Act I as a baby, and then as a young boy, where his music is almost completely confined to strings and oboe. Thus before his character even appears as an adult man, he is cast, musically speaking, with the typically effeminate oboe, and the instruments that have already been paired with female characters. As an adult he is characterised, in Tippett's words – through Priam – as a 'playboy' who abandons his duty to his family and city, steals another man's wife, and in doing so brings lengthy war and inevitable destruction to his home. Both Hector and Priam chastise him for acting irresponsibly and in an emotionally volatile manner (typically feminine shortcomings) at various points during the opera. Following Hector's death, Priam obliterates Paris's filial masculine identity completely, as he tells the Young Guard: 'I have no son, Paris. I had a son, Hector. But he is dead'; only to re-establish it a few bars later, as he replies to the Guard's question 'Who kills Achilles?' with the words, 'Paris, my son'. As Paris later tells Priam that he has killed Achilles and

avenged Hector's death, Tippett grants him accompaniment from the brass section, suggesting he is perhaps finally worthy of identification with the men.

Achilles, the Greek hero, is portrayed in a very different manner to the other male characters in the opera, although it is up to the audience to interpret this as a function of either his indeterminate sexuality and potentially erotic love for Patroclus, or his status as an exotic, dangerous foreigner. He first appears in Act II, Scene 2, languishing in his tent and refusing to return to the battlefield. He sings an intensely lyrical, evocative lament, accompanied only by a virtuosic guitar line, to his companion Patroclus; this musical portrayal, particularly when contrasted with that of the other male characters, facilitates an interpretation of their relationship as sexual. Despite this perhaps rather effeminate lamentation, longing for home, and overtly emotional display to Achilles' lover, Tippett demonstrates forcibly in the final section of Act II that Achilles is definitively a masculine man. He may not conform to a standard heterosexual norm, but this does not make him a woman. No sooner have Hector, Priam and Paris celebrated Patroclus' death, when Achilles' war cry (echoed by the entire Greek army) sounds angrily three times, penetrating and dominating the whole soundworld, and establishing the beginning of the Trojan military downfall.

Through these four characters, Tippett establishes several different perceptions of masculinity. It is interesting that his female characters, by contrast, occupy a far narrower character set, fulfilling typical feminine roles. In Ancient Greek society, male sexuality was far less clearly defined than it is today, and than it was in the period during which *King Priam* was composed. Male citizens frequently had sexual liaisons with both their wives and concubines, in addition to their male friends, and pleasure was considered to be as reasonable as procreation as a justification for sexual union. Actions, modes of behaviour and character traits that in the twenty-first

century are considered to be effeminate or unmanly were commonplace in fifth century Athens, and thus were unremarkable. In an interpretative space in which Attic tragedy provides such a prominent paratextual source for readings of Tippett's opera, the engaged reader is encouraged to consider this catalogue of masculine identities with an open mind.

3.5 Reading Social Commentary in *King Priam*

Two central assertions inform and shape the following interrogation of *King Priam* as a social artwork: firstly, Aristotle's injunction that 'without a deep arousal of emotion, tragedy cannot possibly be successful';⁶⁷ and secondly Slavoj Žižek's declaration that the 'sine qua non of successful communication is a minimum of distance between appearance and its hidden rear.'⁶⁸ The Greek concept of *katharsis* fulfils this essential function of tragic drama; thus moments of *katharsis* in Tippett's opera will be presented before we consider Tippett's social commentary in broader terms, and finally evaluate the dramatic devices by which Tippett interacts with the semiotic gap in the creation and maintenance of the necessary distance required for effective mediation of the universal for the individual within the scope of the reader's engagement with the work.

While we may not automatically associate Tippett's opera with such overt social ambition as is evident in some of its musical paratexts (particularly Britten's *War Requiem*), it is certainly possible to read *King Priam* as a mythologically mediated and musically realised polemic against what the composer saw to be abhorrent aspects of his own society and to interpret further the ultimate

⁶⁷Halliwell, *The 'Poetics' of Aristotle*, 8.

⁶⁸Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 41.

transcendence experienced through Priam's eventual death and release from human suffering at the end of the work as an appeal to the potential for something better, or at the very least a willing resignation to the foibles of human existence. Magee observes a recurring juxtaposition of two conflicting value systems throughout Wagner's oeuvre, which might be summarised as spontaneity versus institutionalisation.⁶⁹ This can, significantly, be mapped on to the binary of the individual versus the collective and, within the context of twentieth- and twenty-first century socio-political history, that of the worker versus the capitalist. In Wagner's music-dramas, this conflict is 'always cataclysmic; and those who live by the heart must expect to be crushed by society';⁷⁰ for instance, Siegmund and Sieglinde declare their romantic love for one another, even after realising that they are brother and sister, and they are punished for this incestuous relationship by Fricka, who represents a bastion of legal marriage. In *King Priam*, too, the human characters make their devastating moral choices on the basis of their emotions, even when they consciously attempt to do the opposite, and ultimately suffer enormously. Perhaps Tippet's removal of agency from Priam's initial choice with regard to Paris' fate might be read as an illustration of the futile struggle of the individual worker in a seemingly inescapable capitalist hegemony; despite Priam's verbal indication that Paris should be exposed, the Young Guard, Old Man and Nurse act according to his true emotions.

The centrality of fifth-century tragedy to the Greek civic sphere cannot be questioned. The genre and corpus of associated works provided ample opportunity for the reflection upon, and examination, criticism, reformation, improvement, redefinition and continuation of, the social foundations of Athenian life. As Cartledge

⁶⁹For further elaboration see Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 118-119.

⁷⁰Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 119.

writes, the genre was ‘considered conducive to the formation of a better informed and more deeply self-aware community, and to its periodical political re-creation.’⁷¹ No-one could sensibly seek to assert that twentieth-century British opera operated under quite such ambitious premises, but it would be crass to suggest that *King Priam* does not speak to those wishing to debate, challenge and reformulate the status quo of mid-century British socio-political life, particularly given Tippett’s outspoken political stance. Furthermore, Athenian tragedy performed a vital role in giving voice to the disenfranchised, since women, non-Athenians, and slave characters are permitted on the stage to address those with whom they would ordinarily have little contact and certainly no influence. Edith Hall suggests that this represents a prefiguring of democracy in a ‘modern sense’,⁷² yet we must remember that the voices of these women, servants, and foreigners speak the words of their Athenian citizen playwright masters, and thus we might question whether such superficial expression really constitutes the democratic dialogue in which the modern West takes such pride. On the contrary however, we might agree with Hall, given that in Britain at least, and particularly during the post-war period at the mid-century when *King Priam* was composed, political (and by association social) representation on a national level was still restricted to a relatively small number of individuals who are asked to speak on behalf of a larger constituency group. Those individuals are still, even in 2014, too overwhelmingly male, white, middle-/upper-class, heterosexual, married, and Christian to represent the diverse range of individuals who make up the British population.

Easterling emphasises the potential of tragic drama to encourage self-reflection

⁷¹Cartledge, “‘Deep plays’”, 22.

⁷²Hall, ‘The sociology of Athenian tragedy’, 93.

and circumspection on the audience's own times:

The setting in heroic times in no way precludes the reference to the contemporary world, and indeed depends on a multitude of ironic reminders to the audience that *they are in the present*, watching events that purport to be happening in another time and place. The more this tension can be exploited, the more powerfully should the play be able to enthrall its audience.⁷³

If we accept this premise, there is no reason why *King Priam* should not be investigated under the spatial paradigm as a social artwork, one which offers commentary on the world in which it was created and demands of its audience a certain level of critical engagement with the contemporary society that it implicitly depicts. Jean-Pierre Vernant suggests that fifth-century Athenian tragedy arises at a very specific historical moment, one of the turning points in Ancient Greek history:

[The tragic moment] thus occurs when a gap develops at the heart of the social experience. It is wide enough for the oppositions between legal and political thought on the one hand and the mythical and heroic traditions on the other to stand out quite clearly. Yet it is narrow enough for the conflict in values still to be a painful one and for the clash to continue to take place.⁷⁴

Can *King Priam* be said to have been composed at such an historic social juncture? If we are to argue in favour of the opera's modernist credentials, then the answer to this question must be affirmative. Edith Hall observes that recent scholarship on Athenian tragic drama as social signifier has started to move away from a preoccupation with the details of the city's history, to focus on 'the broader social tensions underpinning Athenian life'.⁷⁵ The populations of postwar Europe, Britain not least, were recovering from the brutal devastation caused by the conflict and coming to notice aspects of society which no longer aligned with their own personal

⁷³Easterling, 'Form and performance', 167.

⁷⁴Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 27.

⁷⁵Hall, 'The sociology of Athenian tragedy', 94.

values. The position of women who, having been somewhat liberated during wartime, now found themselves once more subordinate to their male counterparts and forced back into domestic life is but one pertinent example.⁷⁶

3.6 Conclusions: Positioning *King Priam* in relation to Marxism, Attic Tragedy, and Modernity

To borrow terminology from Rowena Pollard and David Clarke, we might, on the basis of the discussion of the opera's paratexts in Chapter 2, describe a sort of 'chemistry of influences'⁷⁷ to be found in *King Priam*, in which literary, dramatic, philosophical and musical concepts, traditions and materials are intermingled and, importantly, mediated by one another. It is not the case that Tippett merely absorbed this myriad of influences and fused them together in their entirety; rather, as with his paring down of the wealth of potential narrative material offered by Homer's *Iliad*, he carefully selected only those elements which served to assist in the fulfilment of his opera's purpose. Elements of the musical language, dramatic technique and artistic philosophy of Wagner, Stravinsky, and Britten are clearly evident in *King Priam*; the opera, employing an extended tonal scheme and block-form structure, stands as a unique response to the condition of modernity, deploying psychological drama as a form of social commentary, and encouraging the mediation of potentially painful aspects of human experience through the creation of sufficient distance to avoid overt emotional trauma – yet one would never mistake the work for a product of any of these other composers. The opera took its shape from Goldmann's model of Racinian

⁷⁶For an extensive discussion on the struggle of Western European women to re-assert themselves in the post-war period, which lead to the women's movement of the 1960s and 70s, see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Vintage, 2010).

⁷⁷Pollard and Clarke, 'Tippett's *King Priam* and "The Tragic Vision"', 169.

tragedy, yet it does not espouse the sociologist's historiographical outlook. From Bertolt Brecht, Tippett assimilated the intricacies of dramatic pace and structure, and the concept of distancing, but rejected his overtly left-wing homilies. It is thus possible to characterise Tippett's tragic opera as the dramatic enactment of a somewhat more central path through a twentieth-century political landscape scarred by extremes. Clarke writes of this ideological worldview as 'an aesthetic response to a political climate – which, if for no other reason than its very tragic and aesthetic tenor, resembles a Nietzschean swerve',⁷⁸ however, Tippett's outlook does not incorporate sufficient elements of right-wing thought to position him perfectly centrally between Fascism on the extreme right, and Marxism on the extreme left. Perhaps we might locate Tippett more accurately somewhere left of centre as a result of compromising his potential rejection of Marxism (as interpreted and deployed in contemporary Soviet Communism and Maoism) and his careful selection of the more palatable elements of Brecht's theories, with his overriding concern for communicative accessibility, and the sense of a shared unconscious (all of which can be read in *King Priam*).

King Priam was composed between 1958 and 1962, just as, fresh from the horrors of a second cataclysmic global conflict, Britain was embroiling itself in a bipolar political power struggle that would bring the world to the brink of nuclear destruction. Perhaps Tippett's choice of the Trojan War, in line with the opera's overarching theme of conflict – as discussed in this chapter – as the backdrop to the work's narrative was one made deliberately to highlight a lack of human progress in the 2,500 years separating the legendary conflict from its realisation on the Coventry festival stage. After two and half millennia, we still choose to dispute our differences,

⁷⁸Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett*, 87-88.

whether personal or global, on the battlefield. Millions of lives are still needlessly lost, and social, cultural and political boundaries are highlighted, strengthened and reinforced, pushing a sense of common humanity further and further into the sidelines. In this light, the opera's basis in Trojan War mythology could be presented as a challenge, perhaps even an antithesis, to the progression narrative so prevalent during the nineteenth century. If so, Tippetts appears to be demanding of the reader a somewhat revolutionary shift in thought of a kind strongly reminiscent of modernist aesthetics.

It is important to note Tippetts's critique of Goldmann's theories, much as he respected them, through his conception of *King Priam*. Goldmann asserts that tragedy, in the Greek sense, is no longer theatrically viable in a world characterised by a binarism of Marxism and Christianity. For as opposed as these ideologies may be, both are fundamentally utopian philosophies antithetical to the propositions of tragic destiny. I fundamentally disagree with this view of tragedy as antipodal to assertions of utopia. At the very least in its original form, fifth-century Athenian tragedy is without doubt 'a supreme instantiation of what Marxists call art's "utopian tendency"; this expression denotes art's potential for and inclination towards transcending in fictive unreality the social limitations and historical conditions of its own production.'⁷⁹ If tragedy offers a mediation of the utopian vision through mythological narratives with which ordinary people are able to identify, it would seem that it continues to be perfectly viable in our modern world.

Tippetts's determination to successfully create *King Priam* as a tragic opera has been interpreted by several commentators, including Clarke, as an attempt to

⁷⁹Hall, 'The sociology of Athenian tragedy', 125.

refute Marxist epistemology.⁸⁰ One may also assert that, in a similar vein, Tippett rejected Christian beliefs and teachings through the opera, but the emphasis in extant scholarship has remained firmly on the offensive towards Marxism, a trend somewhat unsurprising given the threat of communism and its position in diametrical opposition to Western capitalism both at the time at which the opera was composed and during its subsequent reception and appraisal. This underlying rejection of Marxist theories, primarily the non-viability of tragedy and its associated *katharsis*, perhaps goes some way to explaining why the opera was so well received across the Atlantic. Thomas Rimer recalls that in the past, Tippett's music had been relegated to the sidelines in America as a 'a sort of tart but homemade brew that could not travel well in more sophisticated Boulezian circles', yet then asserts: 'Surely, *King Priam* can put all those sorts of dismissals to rest.'⁸¹

Kemp describes *King Priam* as 'that impossible artifact, a modern tragedy', and lends further support to the interpretation of the work as 'an invitation to the Marxist to pronounce it "un-tragic"'. In Kemp's view, the only medium through which Tippett could legitimately and effectively have expressed his views on Communism was music, 'in his own terms and on his own ground', and he attributes a degree of authorial intent to this supposition, asserting that Tippett definitively wished to show through his opera that 'the "inevitability" of the communist utopia will always be subverted by (non-economic) factors beyond the control of man's best instincts.'⁸² Other notable British composers who expressed personal views on Communism through their music include Alan Bush and Cornelius Cardew. While both these

⁸⁰Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett*, 11.

⁸¹Thomas Rimer, 'King Priam, Michael Tippett', *Opera Quarterly* 1/2 (1983), 166-7.

⁸²Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*, 326.

composers stand apart from Tippett in that they actively advocated Marxist ideology, it is interesting to note that Cardew only turned to Marxism later in his career. Until 1972, he was heavily involved with the European avant-garde movement, and its subsequent emulation in Britain and America, but he later abandoned this affiliation in order to align himself with the extreme left and compose music which would be more socially accessible. So strong were his Marxist beliefs, that it has been suggested that his untimely death at the age of 45 in a hit-and-run accident was in fact a deliberate assassination designed to eliminate a figure who was seen to possess the capacity to instil the virtues of Communist thought in the hearts and minds of the masses through music.

Kemp describes Homer's *Iliad* as 'the ur-tragedy'.⁸³ He asserts the epic poem's complete suitability to convey Tippett's central theme of 'the mysterious nature of human choice', since its narrative demonstrates 'the tragic fact that whatever someone chooses to do and for whatever reasons, honourable or otherwise, the consequences can always be catastrophic'.⁸⁴ To those who consider personal experience a prerequisite for any kind of artistic empathy, it may seem Tippett had no choice but to select a distant mythological war on which to base his opera. He was only a child during the Great War, and then, famously, a conscientious objector who was imprisoned for refusing to engage in military duty during the Second World War. As such he had no personal experience of frontline warfare upon which to draw in order to create an artwork which could offer any legitimate reflection on armed conflict. But such an opposition fails to appreciate the extent to which the mythology of war – even when it has been experienced directly, or vicariously through close relatives – depends on nescience,

⁸³Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*, 326.

⁸⁴Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*, 326.

on the impossibility of an understanding of war that is not already cut through by ideological narratives. And Tippett had the same exposure to that ideology as anyone else living at the time.

If we accept the possibility that Tippett chose to compose *King Priam* around the Trojan War myth to challenge conventional progression narratives, then it is possible to interpret the opera as modernist in that it may be seen to constitute a response to the *lack* of progress achieved in overcoming conflict since the legendary war took place. Indeed, we might additionally read in the opera an impassioned critique of the failure of left-wing radicalism to achieve lasting change or social balance. The world in which Tippett was composing bore the fresh scars of two world wars, not to mention countless other smaller-scale armed conflicts, and the general characterisation of modern reality as fragmented, fragile and volatile associated with modernist art is echoed clearly both in the opera's subject matter and its music. David Clarke asserts the primacy of *King Priam* and Tippett's subsequent works as exponents of the composer's response to the condition of modernity as he experienced it: 'Tippett's oeuvre might be seen as a succession of modernisms, but nowhere are the condition of fragmentation and the knife of an inwardly-directed critical scepticism more apparent than in the period ushered in by *King Priam*.'⁸⁵ Clarke's assertion regarding musical representations of the breakdown of modern society and the associated disruption of linear progress, is illustrated by a distinctively different approach to form within *King Priam*. The opera does not develop organically, but rather progresses through a compendium of separate but related ideas, and the gaping, transformative rupture between story and plot identified through application of the

⁸⁵Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett*, 4.

spatial analytical framework of this thesis in Chapter 2 highlights the deliberate disruption of a sense of teleological narrativity. One might attempt to counter this line of reasoning with the logic that a sense of teleological drive is inevitable because of the imperative to fulfil the story's opening prophesy; however, within the spatial paradigm, such drive is negated by virtue of the shift from diachronic to synchronic perception. The revelation of the prophesy simply functions as an overt signifier of the structure with which we are, as readers, to engage; there is no question as to whether the prophesy will be fulfilled, because as spatial readers we always already know what the 'ending' of the story will be, it is present throughout, and colours our interpretation of every other narrative moment. Alexander Goehr concludes that Tippett's embracing of the friction between his 'dynamic and expressive material and the static monumental structure' – figured as 'the central compositional problem of our time – for serial and non-serial composers alike' – which results from the divergent claims on compositional direction made by the fundamental materials of an artwork and the framework in which they are combined and expressed, concretises his status as a 'modern artist'.⁸⁶ Arnold Whittall's assessment of *King Priam* adds further weight to the opera's modernist qualification; like Goehr he observes a compromise in Tippett's musical language between two contrasting directions, and concludes that 'Tippett's essential modernism resides in the balance between stratified textures and juxtaposed formal segments on the one hand, and the coherence of consistent stylistic qualities and harmonic procedures on the other.'⁸⁷

Several scholars describe the impact of Tippett's personal humanism and universal outlook on the formulation of his music, attributing the inspiration for

⁸⁶Goehr, 'Tippett at Sixty', 24.

⁸⁷Arnold Whittall, *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 239.

his own individual outlook to the concurrent condition of modernity. The composer achieved remarkable success in transcending the widespread feelings of desolation, despondency and desertion which constituted what Whittall refers to as ‘pessimism [...] the most pervasive of all emotional states in later twentieth-century “high culture”’.⁸⁸ Tippett managed not only to overcome this dominant negativity, but further to convey with discernible conviction his own idealism, namely his ever-persistent belief in humanity’s capacity to overcome the universally insignificant differences between individuals and work together to find common ground in order to achieve prosperity. John Daverio asserts a nineteenth-century perspective on the role of the modern artist, which Tippett seems to fulfil, particularly through *King Priam*: ‘In Schlegel’s view, the modern artist who was worthy of the name could not afford either to avoid or idealise the negativity of his or her historico-cultural situation, but rather should meet it head on [...] The creative genius was challenged to embed moments of negativity into the very fabric of an artwork, and what is more, to transform them poetically.’⁸⁹ Bowen maps Tippett’s compositional process as a journey: ‘Tippett’s starting point is [...] a world of fragmentation and multiple polarities: a sense of wholeness is his goal, but its attainment can never be taken for granted.’⁹⁰ Idealistic though Tippett’s aspirations may have been, he was painfully aware of the pragmatic obstacles that lay in the path to the creation of the kind of society he imagined, and the potential impossibility of the realisation of his vision is discernible to the engaged spatial reader through *King Priam*’s musical gestures.

An additional important feature of traditional constructions of

⁸⁸Whittall, *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century*, 239.

⁸⁹Whittall, ‘“Is there a choice at all?” *King Priam* and Motives for Analysis’, 72.

⁹⁰Meirion Bowen quoted in Whittall, ‘Sir Michael Tippett 1905-1998: Acts of Renewal’, 6.

twentieth-century modernism is that of abstraction. Modernist aesthetics, inasmuch as they can be deemed to have existed as some kind of common philosophy, might be said to espouse extreme expressionism, ironically deploying a heightened engagement with reality – sometimes amounting to surrealism – as a form of escapism. This use of art to disengage from (negative aspects of) reality embraces the impersonality and communicational remove offered by industrial progress to project an isolated individualism through separatist notions of elitism and complexity. The vital intellectual dimension to modernism was shamelessly promoted, and Tippett's music, along with that of his contemporary and friend Benjamin Britten, stands in opposition to the attitude that only works employing so-called avant-garde musical language were worthy of the label modernist. In 1969, Britten stated the problem as he saw it in the following terms: 'seeking after a new language has become more important than saying what you mean.'⁹¹ This polemic posits a view shared by both Britten and Tippett, consisting of an acknowledgement of the social nature of art, and the suggestion that music's truer purpose should be to communicate something to its audience, rather than to strive for the heights of abstraction, distancing oneself as far from comprehension as possible. It is unsurprising therefore, that both Britten and Tippett felt that vocal music (both dramatic and not) was perfectly suited to expressing their reactions to and concerns about the modern world in which they were living. Where the European modernists privileged instrumental music with its predilection for abstraction, both Britten and Tippett felt that opera was a genre equally well suited to the task at hand. Rupprecht writes of British composers struggling to 'respond meaningfully to post-war avant-garde developments' in central

⁹¹Benjamin Britten, in 'Mapreading', 93-96.

Europe.⁹² In this sense, perhaps British modernist art at this time might productively be viewed in terms of its reactionary function in relation to European modernist art. Considered in this light, *King Priam* could be interpreted as a meta-critique of European modernism, since the opera offers to the spatial reader the possibility of an expression, through a simultaneously modernist yet non-abstract musical language with which they must actively engage, the plausibility of a common humanity which unites all, overcoming the isolation and individualism so characteristic of modern society.

The significance and stature of *King Priam* within the British operatic tradition should not be underestimated. The work is lauded variously as ‘a work of major significance in the history of British opera... an extraordinarily exciting opera’,⁹³ ‘some of Tippett’s greatest music’,⁹⁴ ‘a work of precision, beauty and uncompromising insight into the human condition, fully worthy of Homer’s great poem’,⁹⁵ one of ‘the most striking examples of music-theatre at modernism’s mid-point’,⁹⁶ ‘Tippett’s one dramatically viable opera’,⁹⁷ and ‘one of the two greatest achievements of Tippett’s life: an inspired fusion of means and ends, and – in terms of concentrated dramatic power and of dialectics held relentlessly in focus – perhaps the only twentieth-century opera that can take its place beside *Moses und Aron*’.⁹⁸ This last comment speaks volumes regarding *King Priam*’s modernist credentials, since the author is asserting

⁹²Rupprecht, “‘Something Slightly Indecent’”, 276.

⁹³Hugh Macdonald, ‘Review’, *Tempo (New Series)* 141 (1971), 42-3.

⁹⁴Peter Dickinson, ‘Review’, [Rev. of Ian Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*] *Music and Letters* 66/3 (1985), 247.

⁹⁵Rimer, ‘*King Priam*, Michael Tippett’, 167.

⁹⁶Rob Haskins, ‘*King Priam* (DVD Review)’, *Notes* 65/3 (2009), 561.

⁹⁷Byron Adams, ‘Review’, [Rev. of David Clarke, *Tippett Studies*], *Notes* (Second Series) 56/4 (2000), 954.

⁹⁸Malcolm Hayes, ‘Review’, [Rev. of Ian Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*], *Tempo (New Series)* 152 (1985), 35.

the opera's rival status to a work described by Richard Begam as 'modernism's most revolutionary opera'.⁹⁹

Regardless of whether or not we are legitimately able to conclude that *King Priam* may be accurately described as an operatic Greek tragedy, the work certainly takes its place as part of the more recent history of this dramatic genre, in what Burian terms 'a system of tragic discourse'.¹⁰⁰ This label implies an additional level of generic intertextuality, beyond the specifics of ideas, aesthetic principles and philosophical outlooks previously discussed, and it is in this light that we ought rightly to consider the opera's potential status as 'Greek' and its potential status as 'modernist'.

⁹⁹Richard Begam, 'Modernism and Degeneracy: Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*', *Modernist Cultures* 3/1 (2007), 33.

¹⁰⁰Burian, 'Myth into *muthos*', 184.

Part III

Myth and Orchestral Music

Chapter 4

Job: A Masque for Dancing: Mediating Life and Faith

4.1 Introduction: Job as Spatial Reader

Job might be described as the biblical ‘everyman’; married to a good wife, with a great many sons and daughters, abundant livestock, and thus a ‘great’ household, he is pious, god-fearing, and persistently faithful. The *Book of Job* describes his suffering, and eventual redemption as his faith in God is tested, and ultimately proven, by Satan, providing a metaphor for the seeming incomprehensibility and injustice of the real-life suffering of those deemed to be ‘good’ people.

The narrative of the Job myth projects a compelling injunction for committed personal engagement on the part of the reader, most significantly through the positioning of the eponymous character as ‘spatial reader’ with whom we – as spatial readers ourselves – are encouraged to identify. Job engages with his own situation, the ‘text’ of his own narrative life, in the process quilting his identity with that of God and that of Satan, so that his existence (the narrative events that seem to happen to him) might productively be read as emanating from Job, as the subject, himself.

In his commentary on William Blake’s *Illustrations to the Book of Job*, O. Alan Weltzien maps the reader onto the figure of Job, writing that ‘the reader of Blake’s *Illustrations* undergoes an education parallel to that of Job. At times the reader will recognise Job’s condition before he does; at other times, Job understands

before the reader.’¹ A common scholarly interpretation perceives Blake’s God and Satan as emanations of Job; that is to say that these characters represent projections of particular facets of Job – or the human condition, since Job represents the ‘Everyman’.² A. E. F. Dickinson elaborates Job’s all-inclusive identity further with reference to Ralph Vaughan Williams’s ballet music for *Job: A Masque for Dancing*, arguing that three sides of human nature – the upright (Job as God), the human (Job as Job), and the abhorrent (Job as Satan) – are explicated by the mythic narrative and illustrated aurally in Vaughan Williams’s score: ‘Whatever the precise relation to its sources, the music may be expected to distinguish three levels of being in the microcosm which the Job legend brings before the reader’s imagination: Job the human, Job the spiritual, and Job the corruptible.’³

4.1.1 Application of the Methodological Framework

As an archetype for the ‘man on the street’ for whom British composers were seen to be writing music in the interwar years,⁴ Job’s suffering has an obvious allegorical connection with the plight of the individual in the immediate past of the Great War. In addition, Job, as rural patriarch and community elder, fulfils the role of the ‘central [...] figure of the herdsman’⁵ in the post-WWI pastoral narrative which has at its core individual subjectivity and desperate escapism, replacing older conceptions of romantic, idyllic, communal landscapes. With this in mind, Vaughan Williams’s

¹O. Alan Weltzien, ‘Notes and Lineaments: Vaughan Williams’ “Job: A Masque for Dancing” and Blake’s “Illustrations”’, *The Musical Quarterly* 76/3 (1992), 301.

²This is the view held by O. Alan Weltzien, Percy M. Young and A. E. F. Dickinson, among many other scholars of Blake’s *Illustrations* and Vaughan Williams’ *Job*.

³A.E. F. Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 348.

⁴Cf. Orr, ‘Elgar and the Public’, 17-18; quoted in McGuire, ‘Edward Elgar: “Modern” or “Modernist”?’’, 23.

⁵Alpers, ‘“The Philoctetes Problem”’, 8.

work stands as an ideal text through which to consider the potential nuancing of the concept of British musical modernism to incorporate the socialist precept, identified in the introduction to this thesis,⁶ that as the bringer of modernity, the ‘man on the street’ might definitively be seen as the subject of modernist artistic responses.

The analysis undertaken in this chapter aims to read and interpret the Job myth through the application of the spatial conceptual framework of the thesis, yet the presentation of that analysis may seem to obfuscate the structural precepts of that framework since in practice, it is far more productive, and indeed more concordant with the paradigm within which the framework exists, to move back and forth freely between the three levels of spatial analysis while drawing comparisons between the biblical story, engravings and ballet music, rather than to consider either each level of analysis or each text discretely and in some sort of teleological order. Thus the guiding trajectory of this chapter will be the narrative presentation of Vaughan Williams’s *Job: A Masque for Dancing*, with the focus placed on this work, rather than the biblical *Book of Job* or William Blake’s *Illustrations to the Book of Job* because it is the musical case study, rather than because it is some sort of cumulative version of the mythological material, a position which this thesis’s foundational methodology vehemently seeks to discourage. The three versions of the Job myth of interest to this analysis will be treated variously as text and paratext(s), since under the spatial conceptual framework none of them is to be considered the primary, or authoritative, version.

We can find in Weltzien’s description of the analytical process for studying Blake’s engravings vindication of the first two stages of the spatial analytical model

⁶ Cf. ‘Appropriation of the Pastoral Trope: Nostalgia as *katharsis*’ in the introduction to this thesis.

propounded in this thesis: firstly, he affirms the importance of the details of the visual layout of each plate, and secondly, he considers the relationships between the plates in the series: ‘to understand [each plate] fully, we must consider the visual composition of each picture, its vertical and horizontal margins, its physical placement and size, and its narrative or exegetical import of biblical quotations or paraphrases; and we must understand the range of cross-references among them. In addition, we must consider the illustrations as a series. The more we study the work, the denser the cross-references become, which makes us continually revise our understanding of Blake’s visual motifs and their transformations.’⁷ Further to this, Dickinson writes, ‘The familiar train of biblical narrative and poetic sequence becomes just a convenient link between each group in the series, just as the Shakespeare rendering of the Montague-Capulet legend bridges the gaps between the successive movements of Berlioz’s *Roméo et Juliette* symphony.’⁸ Jean M. Hagstrum provides indirect validation for the spatial approach, writing that ‘the proper movement in Blake is, both literally and metaphorically, from plate to plate to plate. There is no onward rush of temporal movement.’⁹ Adrian Boult provides emphatic testimony for the interpretative importance of the second and third levels of the spatial analytical model of this thesis: ‘The interpreter of Vaughan Williams need not feel too closely tied to details of the score. His ambition should be directed towards the structure of the music, the inevitability of its rise and fall, to its underlying moods and the growing force of the messages (often so far from anything that can be put into words). Above

⁷Weltzien, ‘Notes and Lineaments’, 301.

⁸Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams*, 343.

⁹Jean M. Hagstrum, ‘Blake and the Sister Arts Tradition’, *Blake’s Visionary Forms Dramatic*, eds. David V. Erdman and John E. Grant (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 87.

all he should aim to convey to his audience the power and integrity of its inspiration.¹⁰

The suitability of Vaughan Williams' *Job* for analysis in terms of its music's mediation of individual subjectivity is suggested by James Day, who describes the fundamental thrust of the work's narrative thus: 'unlike the merely sentimental or pathetic legends which inspire some ballets, we have here in choreographic terms a quest into the nature of man's place in the universe and his eternal spiritual destiny.'¹¹ Percy M. Young draws an interesting comparison between Blake and Vaughan Williams, indicating the fertile ground within their works for synchronic analytical investigation: 'both are "literary" artists and both are aware of the past as a part of the present and equally of the future.'¹² He also contrasts the two artists in terms of their creative response to the figure of Job, an observation which suggests the inherent potential for the mediated dialogic engagement on the part of the listener to a ballet score composed by Vaughan Williams and conceived of in direct response to a set of engravings by Blake: 'Blake is introspective, in Job finding himself; Vaughan Williams is far removed from that standpoint, discovering in the same subject the contemporary world [...] the synoptic vision of the man.'¹³ Michael Kennedy suggests that unlike the subjective depiction of God as Job's spiritual self, or indeed the artist's own spiritual self,¹⁴ in Blake's *Illustrations*, Vaughan Williams' translation of the biblical characters into sound is entirely literal, and free from gloss or

¹⁰ Adrian Boult, 'Vaughan Williams and his Interpreters', *The Musical Times* 113/1556 (1972), 958.

¹¹ James Day, *Vaughan Williams (Master Musician)* (London: Dent, 1961), 128-9.

¹² Percy M. Young, *Vaughan Williams* (London: D. Dobson, 1953), 113.

¹³ Young, *Vaughan Williams*, 113.

¹⁴ Several other scholars perceive an autobiographical facet in Blake's *Illustrations*: Young suggests that God represents Blake's spiritual self, and Satan his materialistic self; and Hofer writes of Job as having interested Blake for more of his life than any other subject because of its resonance with his own existence. Cf. Young, *Vaughan Williams*, 111; and Philip Hofer (ed.), *Illustrations of the Book of Job by William Blake* (London: Dent, 1937), 5.

interpretation from any specific perspective, writing 'he was not at all concerned with their [Blake's drawings'] symbolism';¹⁵ this has potentially interesting implications for individual engagement with the work's mythology, particularly given that *Job* does draw on Blake's interpretation of the narrative in so many other respects. In fact, a more productive way of reading Kennedy's interpretation here might be to acknowledge that it emanates *from Kennedy*; that is, *Kennedy* does not perceive any symbolic depth to Vaughan Williams's portrayal of God and Job - perhaps because he has not actively engaged with the musical language as a spatial reader - but the point is that we must acknowledge the subjective nature, the specific personal character of any individual reader's interpretation as a facet of the interactive spatial analytical process.

For the purpose of the analytical investigations of this thesis, and more generally for hermeneutics, whether Vaughan Williams conceived of God as God, or as Job's, Blake's, or anybody else's spiritual self is irrelevant, what is of interest is how we as actively engaged, spatial readers, conceive of God – or of whatever we might, from an agnostic, atheist, or polytheist perspective, see God to represent – in Vaughan Williams's music. Weltzien suggests that 'the listener moves through the virtual time of the composition just as Blake's reader slowly moves through and ponders the plates of the series'.¹⁶ I would modify this experiential model: the listener moves in the virtual space created through simultaneous engagement with the composition, the plates of Blake's series in their overwhelming entirety, aspects of the listener's own experiential frame of reference, and importantly, aspects of the composer's own experiential frame of reference, imbued in the work through a similar process of active

¹⁵Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: OUP, 1964), 221.

¹⁶Weltzien, 'Notes and Lineaments', 302.

engagement with the mythology at the point of composition.

4.1.2 Introductory Contexts for the Three (Para)texts

Premiered in 1931, Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Job: A Masque for Dancing* has been described as a 'crucial work in the history of English ballet during the twentieth century,'¹⁷ and 'one of Vaughan Williams' most complex and profound stage works.'¹⁸ The ballet is not, however, based directly on the biblical *Book of Job*; rather it was conceived as a stage presentation of William Blake's *Illustrations to the Book of Job*, a set of engravings of the Job narrative originally published in 1826. The work's title is generically misleading: the choreography of the work is entirely balletic, though the influence of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English courtly masque is evident in the formal structure of the music, particularly its absorption of Renaissance dance forms, the incorporation of static tableaux, and the setting on a split stage to represent the separate, but connected, planes of heaven and Earth.¹⁹ As recorded by 'The Star' newspaper in 1932, 'Job is not a ballet, but then it does not pretend to be anything but a vision of the *Book of Job* according to Blake.'²⁰ Vaughan Williams adheres to the tradition of contrasting 'masque' and 'anti-masque' dances to represent the opposing forces of good and evil, playing up what Dickinson describes as 'the sharp contrasts between the celestial dances and the wily gambols of the hellish crew.'²¹ Traditional

¹⁷Frank W. D. Ries, 'Sir Geoffrey Keynes and the ballet "Job"', *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 2/1 (1984), 19.

¹⁸Day, *Vaughan Williams (Master Musician)*, 43.

¹⁹For introductory information on the English courtly masque, cf. Peter Walls, *Music in the English Courtly Masque, 1604-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Ian Spink (ed.), *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain 3: The Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

²⁰Quotation from *The Star* (7 June 1932), in Angela Kane and Jane Pritchard, 'The Camargo Society, Part 1', *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 12/2 (1994), 45-6.

²¹Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams*, 339.

dance forms such as the pavane, galliard, and sarabande are used for the larger-scale chorus scenes.²² The biblical narrative around which the work is structured also shares the characteristic allegorical nature of the mythological materials from which masque narratives were historically created. As a genre, the masque demands active engagement of its audience, as Stephen Orgel observes: ‘Whatever happens in the masque happens not so much between the characters themselves as between the characters and the viewers.’²³

The original scenario for the ballet was created by eminent Blake scholar Geoffrey Keynes following the hundredth anniversary of Blake’s death in 1927, and it had earlier been offered to Diaghilev, who dismissed it as ‘too English and too old-fashioned’;²⁴ thus it came to be financed in England by the Camargo Society, a cultural organisation which commissioned ballet productions through subscriptions and aimed to stimulate interest in, and maintain, a national ballet in England. Vaughan Williams had originally wished to compose the piece as a concert work, and reworked Keynes’s purely Blakean scenario during the compositional process, adding his own stage directions to indicate with precision the musical representation of various aspects of the action and characterisation of the narrative, and interpolating excerpts from the biblical text of the *Book of Job* into the synopsis. Given

²²Succinct definitions of these various dance forms are recorded at *Grove Music Online*: Alan Brown, ‘Pavan’, *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 3, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/21120>; Alan Brown, ‘Galliard’, *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 3, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/10554>; Richard Hudson and Meredith Ellis Little, ‘Sarabande’, *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 3, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/24574>.

²³Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, 198.

²⁴Ries, ‘Sir Geoffrey Keynes and the ballet “Job”’, 20.

Vaughan Williams's dislike of ballet,²⁵ his deliberate harnessing of elements of the English courtly masque tradition, and the overtly nationalistic cultural ideals of the Camargo Society, it is perhaps unsurprising that the choreography for *Job*, created by Ninette de Valois, demonstrates a dearth of commonplace ballet dance types, such as the pas de deux, and extended pointe work for the soloists, and instead incorporates elements of traditional folk-dance. This type of choreography contrasted sharply with the traditional movements of classical ballets and brought a peculiarly English perspective to bear on contemporary developments in ballet following the revolutionary performances of the Ballets Russes in the early twentieth century, as Dickinson describes:

Contemporary ballet fusion inclined to audacious novelty, whether the knockabout farce of *Les Matelots* (Auric) or *Le Pas d'acier* (Prokofiev), a glorification of the machine age and incidentally of the *constructiviste* scenery in vogue [...] The whole conception of *Job* repudiates the glare and glitter, the virtuoso expressions of temptation and inner ecstasy [of works such as Strauss' *The Legend of Joseph*], while asserting its own principles of artistic validity. It is an appeal to face issues, not with a competent egoism, or, on the other hand, with resounding declarations of righteousness in an evil world, but rather with the unspoken gestures of the spirit, and with the unconscious wisdom furnished by an alert and receptive mind. It is at once music for mime and a poetic warning in the quasi-oratorio tradition.²⁶

Yet the first performance of *Job* was a success, and according to Keynes himself, 'some histories of ballet state that it saved the English ballet.'²⁷ Kennedy, too, asserts that *Job* 'marks the emergence of English ballet, allowing it at a crucial moment to free itself from imitative influence'.²⁸

²⁵Ries, 'Sir Geoffrey Keynes and the ballet "Job"', 20.

²⁶Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams*, 339-340.

²⁷Ries, 'Sir Geoffrey Keynes and the ballet "Job"', 30.

²⁸Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 225.

Northrop Frye observes that ‘the fable [as a genre] is not very prominent in the Old Testament, except that The Book of Job is an enormous expansion of one.’²⁹ This ‘fable’ is composed in a combination of poetry and prose, with two chapters of prose at the start and half a chapter of prose to conclude; this Prologue and Epilogue frame forty chapters of verse which contain the central theological and philosophical debates of the narrative which are principally concerned with the human relationship with divinity, and with human pain and suffering, and how to deal with these experiences in the context of faith.³⁰ This central section of the book is characterised by the strength of its rhetoric, which seeks to induce a transformative experience in its reader, rather than to simply convey a set of narrative events and religious concepts. Aside from the power of its rhetoric, the *Book of Job* has significant emotive content; Job is consumed in the central part of the book by a defeating sadness, a bitter defensiveness, and a profound sense of loss, which consume the reader in a compelling empathetic transfer across the semiotic gap as they identify with aspects of Job’s experience.

Young cites ‘the problem of evil, the apparent incongruity of collaboration between God and Satan’, as the core of the *Book of Job*;³¹ Weltzien offers explanation for this quandary by conceptualising God, Satan and Job as emanations of different sides of human existence: ‘God first authorises, then later banishes, Lucifer, a part of his own identity – or Job’s [...] Both God the Father and Satan develop, in part, out of Job himself.’³² Unusually, perhaps even uniquely in the Hebrew

²⁹Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 122.

³⁰There is general scholarly agreement that these two different sections were composed by at least two different authors, cf. Eric M. Meyers and Jon Rogerson, ‘Part One. The World of the Hebrew Bible’, *Cambridge Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce Chilton (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 255; and Bart D. Ehrman, *God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question – Why We Suffer* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 163.

³¹Young, *Vaughan Williams*, 111.

³²Weltzien, ‘Notes and Lineaments’, 317-20.

Bible, God, Satan and the Heavenly Host are portrayed in an extremely human light, heightening the potential for tying together the identities of the book's central characters and encouraging a spatial reading which examines them as manifestations of various aspects of the human experience. In the *Book of Job*, Satan only appears in the frame prose at the very beginning. Once he has inflicted Job's suffering, he disappears from the narrative, demonstrating that he is merely a catalyst for the book's disquisition of the relationship between man and God. In Blake's engravings, Satan occupies a greater proportion of the narrative, appearing as a central figure in six of the twenty-one plates, including plates 11 and 16, which illustrate verse from the central section of the *Book of Job*, rather than the opening prose Prologue. In Vaughan Williams's ballet music, Satan appears in scenes I-IV, VI, and VIII, and is musically implicated in scenes V and VII, meaning that he is only truly absent from the final Epilogue. This variance in Satan's appearance in the narratives of each artwork suggests the greater interpretative potential of a characterisation not tied to an individual physical figure.

William Blake's twenty-one engraved plates illustrating the *Book of Job* were originally conceived of as a set of watercolour paintings, around 1820. Each engraved design is framed with further detail and biblical quotations in the margins. In contrast to the 'feeling of despairing nihilism' that characterizes some of Blake's works from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, his nineteenth-century works display a 'renewed faith in Christianity, though his Christianity was always anything but orthodox'.³³ Critics seem in broad agreement regarding the presence of Blake's interpretative

³³Martin Butlin, *William Blake* (London: Tate Gallery, 1983), 4.

gloss on the biblical narrative: describes the final engravings as ‘a sharply revised, idiosyncratic version of the Old Testament Book’,³⁴ while Dickinson writes that Blake ‘had little concern with the biblical Job, beyond the portrait, in his own particular imagery, of a man who found God through a testing experience.’³⁵ Andrew Solomon asserts the profound interpretative potential to be exploited in Blake’s *Illustrations* for the actively engaged reader:

To understand what Blake has to say requires not blind belief in anything, but a clear recognition and evaluation of the direct personal experience which is the fabric of our lives, a fresh look at what we usually take for granted. We may therefore find his art disturbing. It is intended to be. It confronts us with that in ourselves which we have suppressed, with our evasions and self-deceptions. Therein lies its healing power. If it is to do its work we must not take refuge in academic detachment or psychological jargon, but must allow both Blake’s images and the poetry of the Book to speak to us, to lead us to the imaginative experience of our own hidden desires, fears, love, hate, pride, guilt, scorn, and shame. The important thing is to relate the elements of the story to our own, very personal, feelings, so as to throw light on them, and be ready to sacrifice cherished illusions about ourselves and the world, to free ourselves from the unconscious bondage of false values and open the way for truth to come to us. This requires courage; but the demand for it comes from our deepest sense of integrity.³⁶

It is possible to interpret Blake’s engravings as representing the constituent stages of a fall from grace, and eventual redemption, mirroring the ultimate trajectory of Christian faith, if we trace a path from the original sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and his ascension to heaven. Dickinson writes: ‘The Job myth could be shown to reveal stages of decline, from the insecure religious confidence of a literal law-abiding piety to the hellish depths of “self-hood” or “self-righteousness”. But this would be followed by stages

³⁴Weltzien, ‘Notes and Lineaments’, 301.

³⁵Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams*, 341.

³⁶Andrew Solomon, *Blake’s Job: A Message for Our Time* (London: Palamabron Press, 1993), 2.

of resurrection, through an almost innocent mood of enlightenment and physical experience, to the supreme vision.’³⁷ This familiar trope is here personified through Job’s individual experience, as Weltzien writes: ‘We interpret all facets of the plates in Blake’s *Illustrations* in terms of Job’s changing condition’;³⁸ and it is projected back onto the universal through its allegorical resonance. Solomon describes the moral and spiritual objectives underlying Blake’s artistic expression, outlining a process of guided self-discovery which is synonymous with the plight of Job, and with the intended experience of the reader as they engage with Blake’s work:

We are born into the world ignorant of its ways; and it is from our parents that we learn how to behave. From them we first receive our ‘knowledge of good and evil’. But, as in the myth of Adam and Eve, this knowledge is not what it seems. We come to identify ourselves with what Blake calls a ‘selfhood’, which may be socially acceptable, but is not true to what we really are. We are ruled then by reason rather than by intuitive inward judgement, an unwitting betrayal of our own integrity [...] We compulsively seek to compensate, whether through physical pleasures or through power and possessions, for what we must deny ourselves to maintain that idealised ‘selfhood’. Rationally we may not be able to see any other meaning in life; but these compensatory urges will never satisfy the suppressed needs by which they are driven, so in effect they are themselves insatiable [...] It is a vicious circle, the more control we exercise, the more urgent the need to break out somewhere to compensate for what we deny ourselves. Blake’s way out of this trap is through what he calls the ‘annihilation of the selfhood’, letting go of that falsely idealised view of oneself, acknowledging characteristics which one has believed to be totally unacceptable. This is a daunting challenge, a painful sacrifice; but once it has been made, the pain is left behind. Though we can never return to the innocence of childhood, this self-acceptance, a repudiation of the accusing ‘spectre’, brings a release from those destructive compulsions and a wonderful new freedom, the freedom to judge for ourselves honestly according to our true feelings instead of being ruled by prejudice [...] There is now nothing to compensate for, so our former ‘sinful’ compensatory urges will have vanished. We are become whole, restored to our full unfallen natural strength with the integrity and confidence which stems from within, independent of the judgement of others. Thus, if we will listen to him intelligently, Blake can bring a lasting ease and contentment to our lives.³⁹

³⁷Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams*, 342-343.

³⁸Weltzien, ‘Notes and Lineaments’, 331.

³⁹Andrew Solomon, *William Blake’s ‘Great Task’*, July 2011 – included as insert in *Blake’s ‘Job’: A Message for Our Time*.

Dickinson describes Blake's *Illustrations* as 'a fresh presentation of stages in the fall and rise of the man of vision',⁴⁰ and following this fall and ascent paradigm, he divides the series of engravings into two parts, as follows:

A – Descent

Plates 1-3, and 4-6: A vulnerable, statute-abiding Job, in contact with a faltering God and an increasingly powerful Satanic emanation; comparable to the image-worshipping Aaron of Schoenberg's *Moses und Aaron*.

Plates 7-11: An isolated, stricken, and despairing Job, in touch with God only as visualised by Eliphaz, a cruel dispenser of justice; accused by his friends of false religion, yet still confident of right, but finally cast down to hell itself by the discovery, in a nightmare, that his moving spirit is Satanic, punitive, and earth-bound.

B – Ascent

Plates 12-15: The wrathful Elihu chides Job by pointing to the stars, whose evocative beauty begins the process of rescuing Job from the abyss of his pride. A vision of a partly cruciform God in the whirlwind, of the higher and lower creation.

Plate 16: A last judgement. Job repudiates (on his left) his past life, of which Satan is the key figure, and is thus purged of error.

Plates 17-21: A vision of Christ, drawing Job and his wife upwards and humbling his former critics. Formal worship and praise in a transformed context – somewhat prolonged, it seems, to make 21. (God is present now only in his halo. The ideal stage is reached: *esse est percipi*.)⁴¹

Vaughan Williams's scenario and score appear to reject the fall and ascent paradigm, presenting instead what Weltzien perceives as a journey upwards to an enlightened state: 'The reduction [by Vaughan Williams of Blake's twenty-one plates into effectively six sections] [...] brings into bold relief the arc of the drama – Job's growth from captivity to redemption.'⁴² A spatial interpretation of the shape of Vaughan Williams' rendering of the Job narrative removes the need to characterise Job's chronological progress through the scenes of the ballet in a teleological trope;

⁴⁰Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams*, 342.

⁴¹Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams*, 345.

⁴²Weltzien, 'Notes and Lineaments', 311.

rather, it enables the reader to conceive of Job as a human, living faithfully, and suffering bitter pain and loss, leading others in praise and devotion to God, and yet enduring such hardship as incites him to question his own piety, all at the same time.

4.2 Prologue to the Analysis

Vaughan Williams's scenario for *Job* consists of nine scenes, each based on one or more plates from Blake's *Illustrations*, and consisting of one or more interlinked constituent dances. However, the segue transitions between scenes IV and V, VI, and VII, and VIII, and IX, create the auditory impression of only six sections. Plates 9, 15, and 17 are not explicitly mentioned in the score, but Eliphaz's terrifying vision of God from the first dialogic cycle (illustrated in plate 9) can reasonably be assumed to be subsumed within the Dance of the Comforters in Scene VI. Weltzien writes that the work in its entirety 'functions as a series of *tableaux vivants* [...] In these *tableaux* we *hear* the shapes we *see*.'⁴³ He also draws a parallel between the frames of Blake's engravings, and the orchestral forces for which Vaughan Williams has constructed his ballet music: 'Everything within the borders of each plate, including God the Father, Satan, and Jesus, defines the status of Job's soul at any given stage of Job's narrative. Similarly, the orchestra is an acoustic frame for Blake's "Job".'⁴⁴ The dance on stage is performed in two distinct spaces, each representing a separate, but connected, plane of existence: '*Job* as a ballet distinguishes between terrestrial and celestial zones on stage; half-way through scene 1, for example, angels "appear at the side of the stage as in Blake [plates] II and V." Vaughan Williams preserves Blake's

⁴³Weltzien, 'Notes and Lineaments', 304 (original emphasis).

⁴⁴Weltzien, 'Notes and Lineaments', 302.

cloud-belt distinction first discerned by the reader in plates 2 and 5.⁴⁵ Interestingly, Vaughan Williams's *Job* does not follow the chronological progression of the biblical *Book of Job* or Blake's *Illustrations*; the divergences are evident in this mapping of the Blake engravings and the sections of the biblical book onto the musical score:

Vaughan Williams's <i>Job: A Masque for Dancing</i>	William Blake's <i>Illustrations to the Book of Job</i>	Biblical <i>Book of Job</i>
Scene I 'Hast thou considered my servant Job?'		Prologue
Introduction	1	
Pastoral Dance	1 (angels from 2, 5)	
Saraband of the Sons of God	3 (angels from 2, 5)	
Satan's appeal to God	2, 5	
Scene II 'So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.'		Prologue (cont.)
Satan's Dance of Triumph	5	
Scene III 'Then came a great wind and smote the four corners of the house and it fell upon the young men and they are dead.'		Prologue (cont.)
Minuet of the Sons and Daughters of Job	3	
Scene IV 'In thoughts from the visions of the night... fear came upon me and trembling.'		Job's Opening Monologue/Prologue (cont.)
Job's dream	6	
Dance of plague, pestilence, famine and battle	11	

⁴⁵Weltzien, 'Notes and Lineaments', 311.

Scene V 'There came a Messenger.'		[Prologue (cont.)]
Dance of the Messengers	4, 6	
Scene VI 'Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth.'		Three Cycles/Job's Monologue Dialogic Closing
Dance of Comforters	7, 10	
Job curses God	8	
Vision of Satan on God's throne	Parody of 2, 11	
Scene VII 'Ye are old and I am very young.' 'Then the Lord answered Job.'		Elihu's Speeches/[Poem to Wisdom]/God's Speeches
Elihu's Dance of Youth and Beauty	12	
Pavane of the Heavenly Host	13, 14	
Scene VIII 'All the Sons of God shouted for joy.' 'My servant Job shall pray for you.'		God's Speeches (cont.)/Epilogue
Satan is driven down. Galliard of the Sons of the Morning	14, 5, 16	
Altar Dance and Heavenly Pavane	21, 18	
Scene IX 'So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.'		Epilogue (cont.)
Epilogue: Job, surrounded once more by his family	19, 20, 21	

4.3 Exploring the Mediation

4.3.1 Mapping 'story' and 'plot'

'The whole work is full of "coups de theatre" [...] whether they be points of scoring [...]; or of dramatic anticipation [...]; or of structure.' – James Day⁴⁶

In the remainder of the chapter, Vaughan Williams's *Job* will be analysed in detail alongside aspects of the biblical *Book of Job*, and Blake's *Illustrations*. Moments of synergy and deviation between story and plot will be identified and interpreted under

⁴⁶Day, *Vaughan Williams (Master Musician)*, 129-130.

the spatial framework of the thesis, in order to highlight significant features of the musical figuring of the Job myth in which resides the potential for a more nuanced interpretation of meaning than might ordinarily be apparent. The analytical journey across the three (para)texts serves to explicate an examination of the ballet as a modernist British pastoral in which Vaughan Williams's musical language may be seen to knit together temporally-distant narrative moments under a spatial paradigm to reveal new interpretative possibilities for the engaged reader as they consider the role and power of God and of Satan, the multifaceted experience of the 'everyman', the hollow triumph of evil, the ultimate submission of the blindly arrogant, and their own engagement with mythology through which their experience – whether framed by religious faith or a non-religious moral code – is itself mediated.

4.3.2 Scene I – 'Hast thou considered my servant Job?'

Scene I is broadly constructed in line with the Prologue to the *Book of Job* and the succession of the opening plates in Blake's *Illustrations*.

Prologue [Chapters 1-2]⁴⁷

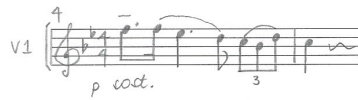
Job lives a happy, righteous life. He has many children, and is wealthy. In heaven, God asks Satan (the accuser) to look upon Job's piety. Satan challenges God, saying that Job's faith and devotion are a direct response to the blessings he has received from God; if these were taken away, Job would abandon God, and curse him. God responds by giving Satan permission to attack the things that are important to Job – his children, animals, land, and wealth – but not to harm Job himself.

The Introduction specifically depicts Blake's first plate: Job, surrounded by his family and animals, living a faithful life and worshipping God. The music begins with a 'Largo sostenuto' statement of Job's identifying theme (figure 4.1), a lyrical, metrically fluid exploration of the opening G minor tonality - rising from tonic to dominant,

⁴⁷My own synopsis, given here, is based on the Authorized King James Bible.

Tr 

A sense of growing intensity, propelled by continuous movement and an ascending tessitura and complemented by the addition of counter-melodies first in the lower strings from bar 1, and then in the bass flute and violins in bar 4, produces an interwoven tapestry of uncertainty, foreboding and stoicism. The bass flute and violin counter-melody consists of a melodic line descending through a perfect fourth, with a triplet circling around to decorate the final note (figure 4.2); this recurs at several points throughout the work.



Despite the $\frac{4}{4}$ time signature, the tension between duple and triple metre which characterises the work as a whole is immediately evident here, created through the simultaneous triplet and regular quavers, and the frequent extension of phrases over barlines, and syncopated rhythmic patterns.

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before it is taken up by the rest of the woodwind and first horn.



Figure 4.3: *Job* Scene I – bar 8

The pastoral motif mutates into a descending chromatic triplet figure, which by bar 14 is being played by all of the woodwind (except bassoons) and both harps. This is underlaid with Job's theme in the lower strings, starting this time on the third, rather than first, beat of the bar, and then again with the same theme played by the violins in octaves, starting on the first beat of bar 16, as Job's children enter. One bar later, the violas, cellos and horns begin to play a new contrasting figure in straight tenuto quavers, grouped in fours, but beginning on the second beat of bar 16, so that each group of four cuts across what should be the strong beats of the bar. The first and second harps pick up this material, at bars 18 and 20 respectively, as it begins to dominate the texture. From bar 18 the descending triplet figure, which has already shed its chromatic colour, disintegrates, accompanied by a general thinning of the texture, a drop in dynamic level to pianissimo, and a fall in tessitura. At bar 20 the sound begins to die away; the quavers, now grouped in fours from the first beat of the bar, are slurred together, and the violins play a final figure falling from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{1}$, and ending on $\hat{4}$ (figure 4.4), opening the way for the sparser texture which follows.

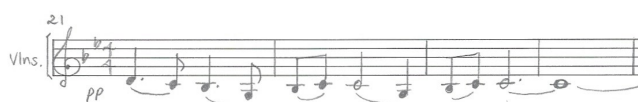


Figure 4.4: *Job* Scene I – bars 21-4

Figure 4.5: *Job* Scene I – bars 25-38

The ‘Pastoral Dance’ switches to $\frac{9}{8}$, and the tempo increases to ‘Allegro piacevole’. Vaughan Williams’s notes on the score dictate that first the women dance alone, to an unaccompanied duet between the first and second flute (figure 4.5). The first two phrases in the first flute are echoed in turn by the second flute, which then extends the second phrase and takes the lead, while the first flute adds descant-like decorative figures between the second flute’s phrases. The first phrase starts on $\hat{1}$, and ascends to $\hat{5}$, and thereafter $\hat{5}$ is prolonged until the second flute takes the lead and the emphasis falls onto $\hat{4}$. From bar 38, the bassoons mimic the flutes’ duet as the men take their turn in the dance, while both flutes continue to decorate over the top of the texture, but with varying phrase lengths so that all of the lines overlap in different places. Harmonic support is provided through muted, sustained chords

in the lower strings; yet the rhythmic displacement created through changes of chord on beats 4,1,4,4,1,7,4,4,1,7,7,1,7,4,4 of successive bars contributes to the heightened sense of physicality and movement in this section. From bar 42, the violins also add decorative phrases, mimicking the melodic fragments played by the woodwind.

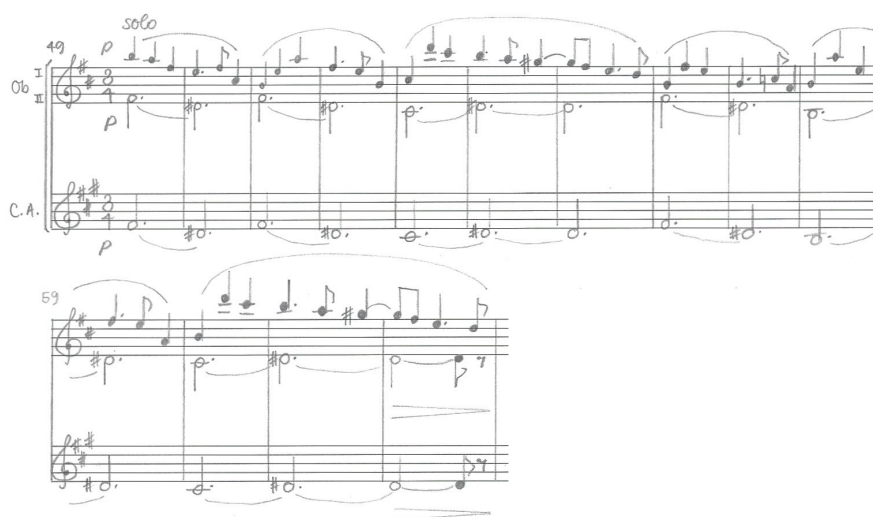


Figure 4.6: *Job* Scene I – bars 49-62

At bar 49, the men and women dance together for the first time, although in two separate circles. The metre switches to $\frac{3}{4}$ and we return to 'L'istesso tempo'. For 14 bars, the oboes and cor anglais play an eerie trio (figure 4.6), oscillating between B major and G \sharp minor, with a 2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 3 bar phrase structure which perpetuates the continued tension between duple and triple metre, and the sense of uncertain forward motion. At bar 63, as the men and women begin to dance together more freely, the music switches immediately back into G minor and reprises the pastoral dance theme in the flutes, and an altered version of the oboe and cor anglais trio theme in the violas. As in the original statement, the bassoons join the flutes, but this time after only four bars, and this time in rhythmic and melodic unison, an octave apart.

As they continue to dance, accompanied by a new variation on the pastoral dance theme in the flutes, oboes, and clarinets, Job – represented aurally by the third horn, violas and cellos playing a rhythmically augmented version of his theme over an E \flat pedal in the bass clarinet, second bassoon, contrabassoon, fourth horn and double bass – stands to bless his children; this action is depicted with a fortissimo (the first use of this dynamic in the work) G harmonic minor scale, with added C \sharp , descending through an octave in the cor anglais and violins, which dominates the texture. Half-way through bar 73, the cor anglais, first horn and second violins pick up the Job theme, followed swiftly by the first violins and first trumpet one bar later. The third trumpet plays the pastoral dance theme at bar 75 – significantly, this is the first time a brass timbre is used for lively dance material, prefiguring Satan’s emergence as the antagonist of the narrative in his dance in the following scene. This moment constitutes the first small deviation between the ‘story’ of the Bible, mirrored directly thus far in Blake’s *Illustrations*, and the ‘plot’ of the masque.

The pastoral dance draws to a close as the second trumpet and first violins play a metrically augmented version of the descending motif from the counter-melody to the original statement of Job’s theme (figure 4.2), leading into a flurried ascent in bar 77 which prepares the formation on stage of a tableau as in Blake plate 1. Job is seated with his wife, centre stage, under a huge oak tree, his family and livestock kneeling around him. They are all praying. The melodic shape and direction of the cascading flute, oboe and violin phrase which accompanies the formation of the plate 1 tableau at bars 77-9 anticipates the aural signification of God seemingly relinquishing control of Job’s immediate fate to Satan at ‘All that he hath is in thy power’. Conversely, the expression of God’s action in passing authority – albeit in an ultimately limited and temporary manner – to Satan, illuminates through spatial superimposition the

(usually obscured) source of Job's suffering: his complacency and pride. Vaughan Williams's score annotations state that at this point angels should appear on the sides of the stage, as in the margins of plates 2 and 5 in the Blake *Illustrations*.

There are three motivic figures which combine here to illustrate this moment: the flutes, oboes, clarinets, first trumpet and violins play a drawn-out, descending figure which cascades down through the use of triplet crotchets and pauses in between on longer notes a tone apart (figure 4.7); the horns, violas and cellos play a more mobile descending pattern (figure 4.8); while the trombones and harps play straight tenuto crotchets, grouped in fours, but beginning on the second beat of the bar (figure 4.9), an augmented version of the earlier quaver figure.



Figure 4.7: *Job* Scene I – bars 78-9



Figure 4.8: *Job* Scene I – bars 78-9

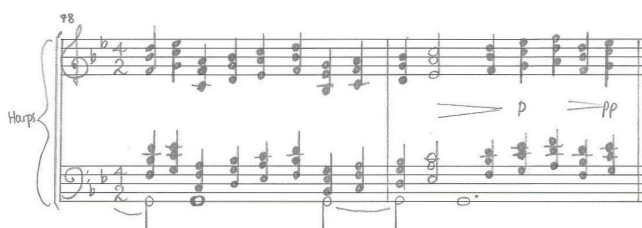


Figure 4.9: *Job* Scene I – bars 78-9

All of this is underpinned by a sustained tonic pedal in the double basses, tuba, timpani, contrabassoon, bassoons and bass clarinet. After a slight pause, the tableau

disperses, leaving Job and his wife in quiet meditation down stage, flanked by the angels. The musical texture rapidly thins, in conjunction with a general fall in the tessitura, and descending melodic fragments in the clarinets, bass clarinet, horns, muted third trumpet, solo viola, and solo cello, which alternate with fragments of the pastoral dance theme in the flutes, and then the bass flute.

Satan's entry is marked by two sets of accented, staccato pairs of descending chromatic intervals, grouped in threes, played by the bass clarinet, bassoons, contrabassoon, and pizzicato cellos and double basses (figure 4.10).

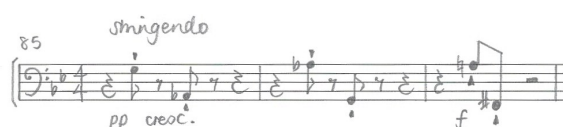


Figure 4.10: *Job* Scene I – bars 85-7

A rapid crescendo and build up in intensity features in each set, and the second time, two further quaver pairs are added at the end, heightening the tension and allowing for a further increase in dynamic to fortissimo. Underlying these articulations, the violins play a motif which outlines the minor third at the bottom of the G minor scale, decorated with an upper neighbour $\hat{4}$ (figure 4.11).



Figure 4.11: *Job* Scene I – bars 83-7

A cymbal roll with crescendo at bars 92-93 anticipates the militaristic brass fanfare which heralds Satan's arrival, featuring a characteristic rising minor third (figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12: *Job* Scene I – bars 92-4

From here, plates 2 and 3 are invoked in reverse order, in order to convey in the temporally-bound performance of music and dance that which is already evident if one reads the music, or indeed the engravings, from a spatial perspective. Plate 3 presents the reader with simultaneous apprehension of the unity and prosperity of Job's family, and their imminent suffering at Satan's hands. Aurally, the former part of this image is illustrated during the Saraband of the Sons of God, following sixteen bars of transitional material during which the brightly contrasting key of A major is tonicized through an underlying timpani pedal and ascending broken chords in the strings, harps and horns outlining $\hat{1}$, $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{5}$ as the action on stage moves from Earth up through the firmament to heaven. The brass affirm the new tonal area with a tonic triad over each ascending pattern, and the woodwind interject with chords prefiguring the main harmonic motions of the theme which is to follow: A minor – C major – A minor, then F major – C major – A major, then A^b major – C major. A final unison A-D-E in octaves in the contrabassoon, horns and strings leads into the next section.

The saraband theme (figure 4.13) is played first by the violins, violas and cellos, and outlined simultaneously by the harps. The A-D-E broken chord pattern is repeated by the bassoons, contrabassoon, horns, harps and double bass in the final bar of each phrase of the theme, to provide a lead into the next phrase and further affirm the A major tonality. The flutes provide homophonic harmony, and the majestic rhythm of the saraband theme is emphasised by the timpani. At bar 126, all the figures on stage bow down to God, and the strings and bassoons play a repeating circling figure articulating in minims the opening fifth of the A major scale (A-B-C-D-E-A), while the woodwind depict the prostration before God with descending versions of the theme's main chordal progressions. An ascending A major arpeggio in bar 131 prepares the final cadence and affirmation of A major as the key of heaven in bars 132-3: contrary motion between the parts, best exemplified by the harps, draws the texture to a more compact final A major chord.

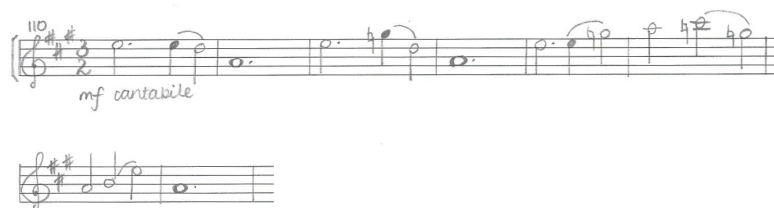


Figure 4.13: *Job* Scene I – bars 110-7

Plate 2 then depicts God directing Satan's attention towards Job ('Hast thou considered my servant Job?'), who sits piously, as in plate 1, at the bottom of the image. There are ten bars of transitional material, during which God beckons to Satan, who moves forward to stand before him. The woodwind, horns and trombones play repeated B major chords, followed by repeated D major chords with a crescendo, and then a fortissimo circling figure of F major – D \flat major – E \flat major – F major, three

times. The bright sharp-key chords represent God's action, while Satan's movement is represented by flat-key chords. At bar 144, a light falls on Job, as God asks of Satan, 'Hast thou considered my servant Job?' Here we return to the original 'Largo sostenuto' G minor Job theme now muted and in canon, with the first entry in the cellos and double basses, the second one bar later in the violas and second violins, and the final entry a further three beats later in the first violins. This reprise of Job's theme aurally connects this moment with the opening of the scene. The interpolation of plate 3 in its position before plate 2 facilitates the omission at this stage of any direct representation of plate 4, which depicts Job receiving the news of the destruction of his lands, livestock and children. Bars 149-56 depict Satan's retort to God, questioning Job's faith under suffering, and incorporate Satan's pairs of accented notes, alternating with his rising minor third fanfare figures, and finally an accented, chromatic, homophonic inverted circling figure, falling through a perfect fifth, and up a tone, in the upper woodwind, horns and trumpets.

From here, we move to plate 5, in which God allows Satan to inflict suffering on Job himself, but without killing him. This represents another deviation from the 'story': in the Bible, and in the Blakean engravings, Satan approaches God on two separate occasions, and brings suffering onto Job's family, animals, and land, before returning to supplicate God on the second occasion, and then attacking Job himself. Vaughan Williams's score and implicit scenario subsume Satan's second meeting with God within the first, encouraging a spatial interpretation of the whole process, in which Job feels the suffering of his family as his own suffering. At bar 157, God decrees that Satan may test Job's faith: 'All that he hath is in thy power.' The flutes, clarinets, bassoons, violins, violas and cellos play a descending figure, cast in C major, but with Lydian mode inflections (figure 4.14), falling through just over two

octaves to represent the descent from Heaven back to Earth.



Figure 4.14: *Job* Scene I – bars 157-61

The ‘All that he hath is in thy power’ motif represents the interwoven identities of God, Satan, and Job: The C major context asserts God’s presence – as a microcosm of the affiliation of diatonic major keys to the heavenly plane throughout the work – while the Lydian modal inflections can be attributed to Satan – again, one instance of a global pattern across the work as a whole under which Satan, or less directly events determined by Satan’s actions, are depicted aurally with modal and/or chromatic writing. In Scene VI, as Job finally appears to give up and appeals to Heaven, ‘Let the Day perish wherein I was Born’, the moment described by Weltzien as ‘the nadir of his captivity’,⁴⁸ a tutti C major chord is deformed through four bars of contrary motion compression composed around Lydian mode inflections.

Preceding a reprise of the Saraband of the Sons of God, the music climbs back up through an A minor 7th chord, with a syncopated crotchet – minim – minim – crotchet rhythm in bar 161 to hold the rush of forward movement back a little. The reprise features a much fuller texture, all instruments are playing together, mostly in rhythmic unison, creating a denser homophony. As the theme draws to a close, the final chords are played, with dynamic swells, and a thinning out of the texture to bring the scene to an end on a unison tonic A. This restatement of the Saraband of the Sons of God towards the end of the scene illustrates Job’s continued faith and

⁴⁸Weltzien, ‘Notes and Lineaments’, 317.

devotion to God.

4.3.3 Scene II – ‘So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.’

Scene II continues with the biblical Prologue, and with Blake’s plate 5, with a particular emphasis on the lower half of the illustration, in which Satan is shown moving downwards, out of Heaven and towards the unsuspecting Job. As the lights come up, Satan is positioned alone on the stage, standing in Heaven.



Figure 4.15: *Job* Scene II – bars 192-6

He is depicted aurally with a rhythmically augmented version (figure 4.15) of the paired descending interval motif which announced his arrival during Scene I, played by the oboes, cor anglais, clarinets, horns, violins and violas. This is underlaid by an oscillating tremolo between B \flat and C \flat in the cellos, double basses, bass clarinet, bassoons and contrabassoon.



Figure 4.16: *Job* Scene II – bars 201-6

During bars 201–6, the trombones play a syncopated ascending figure consisting of two open perfect fifths, followed by a perfect fourth with the root doubled an octave above (figure 4.16), preparing the ground for Satan’s rising minor third fanfare motif, which returns at bar 207 in the flutes, piccolo, oboes, cor anglais, horns and trumpets as Satan is illuminated standing at the bottom of the steps of Heaven. This is

accompanied by a new swirling chromatic figure in the strings, clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoons, contrabassoon and tuba, falling and rising back up through a tritone (figure 4.17).



Figure 4.17: *Job* Scene II – bars 208-211

This strongly articulated motif undergoes rhythmic displacement between bars 208 and 217, shedding its strong sense of three beats in each bar, and falling into an insistent one-in-a-bar feel. Here, there is a simultaneous thinning of the texture, drop in tessitura and dynamic level, creating an almost empty space into which Satan's dance bursts at bar 218.

Satan's dance consists of a chromatic, staccato six-bar theme played by flutes, piccolo, clarinets, trumpets, trombones, pizzicato violins and xylophone (figure 4.18).



Figure 4.18: *Job* Scene II – bars 218-223

The theme is insistent homorhythmic, until the final bar, which features a note, rather than a rest, on the second crotchet beat to propel the music forward into the next thematic statement. The second statement is elongated, with an extra bar added before the final bar, and a sort of five-bar codetta added to the end. All of this is accompanied in the lower strings and bassoons by the swirling figure which led up to the beginning of the dance, and in a more fragmented form in the contrabassoon, cor anglais, oboes, bass clarinet. At bar 236 the accompaniment rhythm mutates once

more, halting the dance as the rising open fifths fanfare figure returns, this time in the oboes, cor anglais, horns and violins. After the end of the fanfare figure, two further bars of the swirling accompaniment motif lead back into a repeat of bars 218-43.



Figure 4.19: *Job* Scene II – bars 245-53

From bar 245, the flutes, piccolo, clarinets, horns, and trumpets play an augmented version (figure 4.19) of Satan's rising minor third heralding figure, underlaid with the chromatic swirling figure in its original form (figure 4.17) in the oboes, cor anglais, bass clarinet, bassoons, contrabassoon, and Satan's pairs of descending intervals in the timpani (played with wooden sticks) and reinforced by cymbal clashes on the second note of each pair. This section provides a transition into the next phase of the dance, which begins at bar 255. Here, the secondary dance theme (figure 4.20), is played by the flutes, oboes, clarinets and violins.



Figure 4.20: *Job* Scene II – bars 255-61

This theme is a melodic variant of the primary theme (figure 4.18) of Satan's Dance, centred around E \flat , and feels slightly more laboured and intense, owing to the replacement of the first crotchet beat and crotchet rest with a minim in the first three bars of each phrase, and the tenuto, rather than staccato articulation marks. The rhythmic character of this secondary theme is reinforced by the trumpets, which play the rhythm of the theme but on an E \flat pedal. The cor anglais, bass clarinet, bassoons,

contrabassoon, horns, lower strings and later tuba accompany the secondary theme with the one-in-a-bar version of the swirling motif.

At bar 267 the secondary theme is repeated, but starting on B \sharp : the entire soundworld has fallen through the tritone interval outlined in the swirling accompaniment motif. Further variation is provided through timbral and metrical changes: the melody is now played by flutes, piccolo, oboes and clarinets, while the swirling accompaniment motif is played, starting on the third rather than the first beat of the bar, by all the strings and alternating phrases in the bass clarinet and bassoons only. Only the first trumpet plays the pedal, but this is now doubled rhythmically by the snare drum, and crucially, no longer reinforces the rhythm of the melodic material of the theme, but plays its own percussive, driving rhythm (figure 4.21).



Figure 4.21: *Job* Scene II – bars 267-8

At bar 277 a cymbal roll underpins the return of the syncopated ascending fanfare (originally figure 4.16), now played by oboes, cor anglais, clarinets, horns and violins, and the swirling motif reverts to its original rhythmic formulation, but commencing here on the upbeat to bar 277 in the bassoons, contrabassoon, and lower strings. This material provides a short transition back into a repeat of bars 254-82, and then on into the next section of the dance.

The secondary dance theme is developed over the following bars firstly through a switch to $\frac{4}{4}$ and ‘Moderato alla marcia’ tempo marking. The march character of this section is immediately evident in the new, *pesante* variant of the swirling motif (figure 4.22) which drives the music forward here from the bottom of the texture (contrabassoon, trombones and tuba).

Figure 4.22: *Job* Scene II – bars 283-4

The militaristic undertone of Satan's destructiveness is implied through repeated timpani rolls which provide a pedal on F underneath the funereal brass chorale (figure 4.23) which itself is formed from the opening melodic rising major third motion of the secondary dance theme.

Figure 4.23: *Job* Scene II – bars 274-9

The main melodic phrase of the chorale is repeated twice after its first statement, and the final restatement is altered through rhythmic variation and melodic ascent, doubled by the flutes, oboes and clarinets, and decorated with a rising chromatic flourish in the piccolo and violins to lead into four bars of transitional material. This material is characterised by hemiola, as the *pesante* version of the swirling motif is shortened to occupy three beats instead of four, and repeated in quick succession in the flutes, piccolo, oboes, clarinets and violins, to effect a quickening of the harmonic rhythm as the general tessitura descends (figure 4.24).

Four tenuto crotchet chords in the final bar here lead back into a repeat of bars 283-92, and then onward into an additional transitional section, which follows a similar design. The basic musical material from bars 283-92 is further developed, with

Figure 4.24: *Job* Scene II – bars 290-2

longer notes being replaced by chromatically inflected ascending scalar figures, and the tension between duple and triple metre is compounded by the constant interpolation of triplet figures over ‘straight’ rhythms. The hemiola phrases from bars 290–2 are re-used, and extended into another general descent with chromatic falling triplets moving from upper to lower woodwind and down through the strings.

At bar 300 a slightly altered version of the primary dance theme returns ‘Presto’ in $\frac{3}{4}$ (but again with the sense of one-in-a-bar) in the bassoons, contrabassoon, third trombone, tuba, xylophone, harps, and pizzicato cellos and double basses, decorated by a new variant of the swirling motif in which the lowest note (previously a crotchet) is replaced with a rest, transforming the figure into a chromatic turn around E (figure 4.25) in the upper woodwind.

Figure 4.25: *Job* Scene II – bars 300-1

All four horns play a muted pedal on C. Throughout this section the texture gradually thickens: at bar 304, the cor anglais, first and second trombones, and pizzicato violas (beat 1) and pizzicato second violins (beat 3) join the melody; at bar 306, the bass clarinet starts to play the chromatic turn motif, and the bassoons and contrabassoon switch to this material from the melody; at bar 307, the first violins and first and second trumpets also join the whole work is full melody, and the oboes switch to

this from the chromatic turn motif; at bar 308, the third trumpet starts to play the chromatic turn motif too. This increase in intensity, along with the corresponding dynamic swells and final crescendo, leads into a return to the opening oscillating tremolo semitone (C \sharp – D \flat) from the very opening of Scene II, here played by the oboes, cor anglais, clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoon, contrabassoon, and lower strings a tone higher than it was originally heard. As Satan climbs up to God's throne onstage, his characteristic falling paired intervals, now rhythmically augmented and accented, are heard in the flutes, piccolo, violins (in octaves) and tuba. In between these phrases, the horns play a muted pedal on G, together with a roll in the side drum, and at bars 324–7, the horns join the flutes, piccolo, violins and tuba in three consecutive interval pairs which lead into the final section of the scene.

At this point, Satan kneels in mock adoration before God's throne; the oscillating tremolo semitone figure is inverted and transposed here onto G \sharp – F-double-sharps in the flutes, piccolo, oboes, clarinets, and violins, while muted trumpets and trombones play a 'Gloria in excelsis Deo!' motif (figure 4.26).

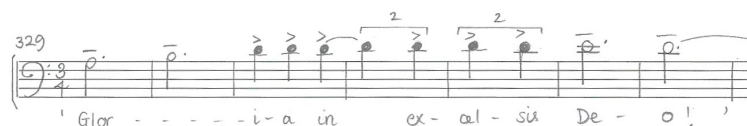


Figure 4.26: *Job* Scene II – bars 329-35

Following this, the hosts of hell enter and kneel before Satan, who stands before God's throne. This is depicted musically with a return of the chromatic swirling motif moving through the orchestra from the lower woodwind and lower strings, to the lower woodwind and upper strings, to the upper woodwind and upper strings before a General Pause at bar 353. This moment of silence precedes Satan sitting on God's throne 'with a big gesture', illustrated aurally with a rhythmically augmented

version of the descending triplet melodic fragment from the ‘Moderato alla marcia’ section of the dance (figure 4.27).



Figure 4.27: *Job* Scene II – bars 354-62

The final note of this figure (G) is followed by a unison G \flat an octave lower in each part, and then one pair of Satan’s characteristic descending intervals, ending on unison F as there is a black-out onstage, and a curtain falls, leaving only the front quarter of the stage visible. The re-use of Satan’s characteristic motifs in this scene ties his presence here to his appearance challenging God in the previous scene, and to his later violent actions, false triumph, and downfall. His ‘Dance of Triumph’ seems presumptuous at this stage, if we read the progression of scenes from a purely temporal perspective; a spatial view allows an interpretation in which Satan’s Dance of Triumph is always already hollow and superficial.

4.3.4 Scene III – ‘Then came a great wind and smote the four corners of the house and it fell upon the young men and they are dead.’

Scene III stages the next part of the Prologue, circling back to Blake’s third plate – and thus deviating once more from the onward progression of the ‘story’ - to depict the deaths of Job’s children for the audience, though Job remains unaware at this stage.

Prologue [Chapters 1-2]/continued.

Satan tests Job, as he has been permitted to do, and Job experiences attacks on his oxen, asses and servants from the Sabeans, on his sheep and servants by the ‘fire of God’, on his camels and servants by the Chaldeans, and on his children by ‘a great wind from the wilderness’. Job responds to these tests with increased devotion. He worships God and remains faithful.

On another occasion, Satan presents himself before God and God reminds him of Job's persistent faith. Satan replies, inciting God to take from Job his good health, for he believes that once his own body is suffering, Job will abandon God and his faith. God thus allows Satan to afflict Job with boils all over his body. Job treats his sores, sitting in ashes. His distraught wife tells him to curse God and end his life, but Job refuses, his faith still persists. Three of Job's friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, arrive to comfort him and mourn his fall from prosperity. The men keep a silent vigil for seven days and seven nights.

This scene stands in striking contrast to its predecessor; the change in mood is immediately evident in the sparse texture and hollow sound of the opening to the 'Minuet of the Sons of Job and their Wives'. The music commences with six bars of introductory material, in which the solo first oboe plays an opening fragment which outlines an ascending minor third, and circles back down to a tone below the first note. The only accompaniment is a bare E minor arpeggio in the first harp (figure 4.28). At bar 373 Job's sons and their wives enter, and dance in front of the curtain.



Figure 4.28: *Job* Scene III – bars 366-71

They hold golden wine cups in their left hands, which they clash (simultaneously with cymbal clashes notated in the score) at various points of articulation in the music which follows. Vaughan Williams's notes on the score dictate that the dance should be 'formal, statuesque and slightly voluptuous, it should not be a minuet as far as choreography is concerned.' The phrase structure in this section is irregular:

$[3+3+2]+[3+3+3]+[3+3+4]+[3+3+3+6]$ – the final phrase of each cycle through the theme is extended, heightening the feeling of circularity, relentlessness and inescapability created by the repetitive material which explores the Dorian mode.

At the start of the first cycle through the theme, the flutes mark the entry of the dancers, playing a melodic fragment which outlines a descending minor third (figure 4.29); this is accompanied by a unison broken chord pattern in the first harp and solo cello. At bar 378 the solo first oboe returns with a fragment that is melodically very similar to its opening material. The end of this phrase is covered by the opening statement of the flute motif in the second cycle through the theme. At bar 386, the solo first oboe plays again, this time with a more expansive figure, which extends the tessitura upwards, exploring a G minor scale, but from C up to B \flat and back down to C again.



Figure 4.29: *Job* Scene III – bars 372-4



Figure 4.30: *Job* Scene III – bars 389-401

At bar 389, the start of the third cycle through the theme, a solo viola enters with a chromatic descending counter-melody (figure 4.30), and the rest of the cello section start to play intermittent pizzicato notes, marking the start of each phrase. The first

horn enters to mark the start of the fourth cycle through the theme at bar 399, and the first phrase here is decorated with a descending fragment in the solo first oboe which prefigures the first violin counter-melody which will commence during the next phrase. For the second phrase, the third flute and violas join the first and second flutes on the melody, the bass clarinet enters with held harmony notes, the harp accompaniment becomes chordal, rather than consisting of a single line, the double basses enter pizzicato mimicking the cello part in the previous cycle, while the cello section play the broken chordal accompaniment tutti. The violins play a two-part counter-melody for the first two phrases of the cycle, before the firsts double the oboe and cor anglais in the final phrase, and the seconds play a new accompaniment line, joined after two bars by the solo first flute. This final extended cycle through the theme provides a transition into the next section of the scene.

This next eight-bar section switches to the Locrian mode (centred on C \sharp), evocative of the bright pastoral trope, and a more mobile $\frac{4}{4}$ metre. The clarinets and bass clarinet play a two-bar ascending arpeggio phrase, which is answered by a rhythmically identical but melodically varied repeat in the flutes, piccolo and bassoons and a counter-melody in octaves in the violins (figure 4.31). This is followed by the first version of the ascending phrase played by the violins and violas with the counter-melody in the clarinets and bass clarinet, and answered by the ascending phrase in the clarinets and bass clarinet once more, with the counter-melody in the flutes, piccolo and bassoons.

At bar 422, the music switches instantaneously back into its previous mode, returning to triple metre, the Dorian tonal area, and one cycle of the original minuet theme in the flutes, first clarinet and first trumpet. This is accompanied by tremolo chords in the lower strings, and a chromatic counter-melody in the violins

Figure 4.31: *Job* Scene III – bars 414-7

(in octaves). The first harp plays phrases which consist of a static chord followed by a broken chord, and this reprise features a fuller percussion section, with timpani, bass drum and cymbals. The bass clarinet and muted horns add to the strings' chordal accompaniment. This cycle through the theme leads into a dream-like distortion of familiar sounds through which an augmented semitonal oscillation (G – F \sharp), reminiscent of that which featured in the previous scene, penetrates in the flutes and first violins.

Bars 438-41 herald Satan's arrival onstage, revealing him as the orchestrator of Job's children's deaths, with his characteristic rising minor third fanfare in the flutes, piccolo, horns, trumpets and trombones. From a spatial perspective, this linking of one of his characteristic motifs directly with the deaths of Job's children inflects all other appearances of this motif with his actions here. In the first two scenes, Satan is already the killer of Job's children, and hereafter, his false victory demonstrates that even the permanence of death cannot prevail over God's justice. Bars 442-67

bring Scene III to its close, articulating an epitomic descent in all parameters of the music: during this final section the tessitura gradually falls through two octaves, the texture thins out, and the dynamic level drops to *pianissimo* as there is a gradual blackout onstage, and the curtain falls. The majority of the parts feature a descending chromatic scalar progression, but fragments of the minuet theme are interpolated throughout.

4.3.5 Scene IV – ‘In thoughts from the visions of the night... fear came upon me and trembling.’

Scene IV illustrates the end of the biblical Prologue, while moving onward to Blake’s sixth plate, in which Job continues to praise God, while he is simultaneously (as we perceive it, through the physical form of the illustration) cast down with boils under Satan. Musically, Job’s own physical suffering is not depicted in the opening section of the scene, rather this focuses on his fear and unease while sleeping; yet, spatially, we are aware as readers that it is Job’s own suffering which finally causes him to question God – his silent mental doubt is implicit in the phrase ‘In all this, did not Job sin with his lips’⁴⁹ - thus a spatial interpretation opens up the underlying cause of his fear which is illustrated here. ‘Job’s Dream’ begins ‘Lento moderato’ with a lyrical, ebbing F♯ dorian mode dream theme which emphasises $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, $\hat{5}$ and then $\hat{1}$ again (figure 4.32). The 7-bar theme is first played by the violas, beginning on the upbeat to bar 469, accompanied by a tonic pedal in the cellos and doubles basses; it then moves into the second violins (who have hitherto been tacet) on the second beat of bar 475 (effecting a subtle change in emphasis across the constituent phrases of the theme), where it is now decorated with a rising and falling scalar counter-melody in

⁴⁹ *Book of Job*; 2:10.

the violas, and a mobile, scalar bass line in the lower strings (figure 4.33); the third statement of the theme is written in canon, with the violins in octaves starting on the upbeat to bar 482, and the cellos and doubles basses starting two beats later, and supported with an octave tonic pedal in the centre of the texture in the violas.



Figure 4.32: *Job* Scene IV – bars 468-75



Figure 4.33: *Job* Scene IV – bars 475-81

Here the curtain rises, and the stage lights come up to reveal Job lying asleep as in Blake plate 6. The final bars of this third statement of the dream theme are altered to elongate the final phrase, paring down the texture and using a drop in dynamic level to transition into the next section of the scene.

The next section of Scene IV (beginning at bar 493) depicts Job's uneasy sleep as he is troubled by nightmares. The music switches to an 'Allegro' tempo, with a

fragmented texture and chromatic inflections. Two rhythmic motifs form the basis of the musical structure here: a dotted crotchet and quaver, and two quavers followed by a dotted crotchet and two quavers. Job's torment, and the tossing and turning motions of his disturbed sleep are illustrated with dynamic swells, and the rapidly rising and falling melodic lines of the oboes, cor anglais, clarinets, first bassoon, first and second horns, muted first and second trumpets, first and second trombones, second violins and violas. These are accompanied by descending patterns of crotchets in the bass clarinet, second bassoon, contrabassoon, third trombone and tuba, and lower strings.

Aural confirmation comes in the next section of the scene, the 'Dance of Plague, Pestilence, Famine and Battle', which deviates from the 'story' in a more nuanced manner. The score annotations refer here to plate 11 of the Blakean engravings, which shows Job asleep, with the quotation 'With dreams upon my bed thou scarest me and affrightest me with Visions'; here we move to Job's Opening Monologue in the biblical story, where he begins to question God, while remaining in the Prologue, as the afflictions – plague, pestilence, famine and battle – cast by Satan on Job and his family are recalled.

Job's Opening Monologue [Chapter 3]

Job wishes he had not been born, he does not understand why he is suffering when he has led such a faithful life. He wants to die now, but this escape is denied him.

The tension gradually heightens across this section, coming to a head at bar 503 with a climax across all parts as Plague, Pestilence, Famine and Battle (each represented by a group of dancers) posture before Job, as in Blake plate 11. A chromatic descent, coupled with a thinning of the texture and general drop in dynamic level and tessitura, follows, leading into the start of the dance of Plague and Pestilence at bar 506. We

return to the uneasy sleep music here for a few bars, before another climax and subsequent descent at bars 511-14, preceding the dance of Famine. The music here consists of a varied form of the uneasy sleep material, with a more cohesive theme (figure 4.34), accompanied by staccato broken chord quaver figures in the strings.



Figure 4.34: *Job* Scene IV – bars 515-9

At bar 520, the flutes, piccolo and third trumpet start to play a soaring four-bar counter-melody which leads into a further climax and shorter descent at bars 524-5, preceding the start of the dance of Battle. The dance of Battle theme is distinctly different to its predecessors.



Figure 4.35: *Job* Scene IV – bars 525-8

It consists of a three-bar militaristic opening phrase (figure 4.35) played by the first and second trumpets and violins, and accompanied by spiky offbeat chords in the trombones, harps and violas, answered by a four-bar response - developed motivically out of the rhythm of the second bar of the opening phrase – played by the flutes, piccolo, oboes, cor anglais, clarinets, bassoons, muted third trumpet, xylophone and later horns (figure 4.36), and accompanied by a repeating quaver pattern in the bass clarinet, contrabassoon and strings which disrupts the sense of duple metre with its sub-grouping into 3+3+2 quavers, with the first of each ascending sub-group accented for emphasis (figure 4.37).

Figure 4.36: *Job* Scene IV – bars 528-32Figure 4.37: *Job* Scene IV – bars 528-31

At bar 533, the dance of Battle theme is restated, but this time the responding phrase ascends melodically, instead of descending, and the upper strings join this line to heighten the intensity as the music moves into the next section of the dance.

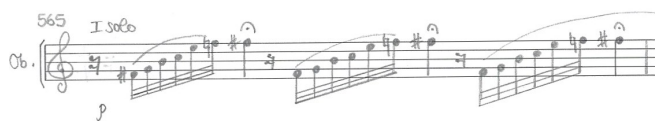
At this point (bar 540), the dancers, headed by Satan, make a ring around the sleeping figure of Job, and raise their hands three times. This is accompanied by four bars of transitional material (which are then repeated), consisting of Satan's heralding rising minor third fanfare chords, here in quick succession, followed by three bars of flurrying, chromatic, scalar motion in the upper woodwind and violins, over staccato quavers driving the music forward in the lower woodwind, horns, tuba, and lower strings. Following this, Satan's heralding fanfare sounds again, leading into a varied reprise of the dance of Battle theme, in which the E \flat saxophone plays for the first time. Over the next eight bars, the dance of Battle theme fragments and disintegrates, becoming dominated by chromatic, semiquaver broken chords which rapidly ascend and descend in the flutes, piccolo, oboes, clarinets and violins. At bar 553, a fortissimo E minor chord sounds throughout the orchestra, providing a pivot

point from which a universal descent (in dynamic level, tessitura, and texture) brings the scene to its close, with the interpolation of fragments of the uneasy sleep music from the scene's opening serving as a reminder of Job's sleeping state. There is no direct depiction of plague, pestilence, famine or battle here, instead this entire section prefigures the following two scenes, in which first Job learns of the truth of his terrible visions, and then he is offered guidance from the three comforters which advocates the delivery of terrifying lessons from God (synonymous in the Biblical reading with wisdom) through dreams and visions. Musically, this allusion is achieved through the use of the E♭ saxophone, which represents the three comforters in Scene VI.

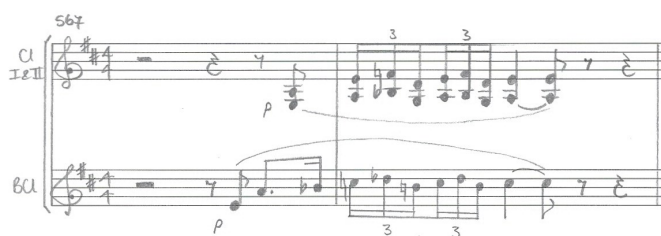
4.3.6 Scene V – 'There came a Messenger.'

Scene V alludes to events which it is presumed must fit within the frame of the biblical Prologue, since they are not explicitly described but must have taken place in order for the chronologically conceived narrative to progress, and moves retrospectively to Blake's fourth plate; the visions of Job's uneasy sleep are confirmed at his awakening, and he becomes aware (as the reader is already) of what has happened. The music commences with Job awakening from his sleep, to find three messengers, who arrive one after the other to tell him that all of his wealth has been destroyed, as in Blake plate 4. A pedal G in the cellos and double basses, tied across from the end of Scene IV pins Job's awakening to the period of uneasy sleep he has just experienced, as the solo first oboe plays three cadenza-like ascending phrases, outlining the Iwato scale (a pentatonic derivative of the Locrian mode used in Japanese music)⁵⁰ with added ♮8, pausing at the top of each run (figure 4.38).

⁵⁰ Cf. Section 7: Pentatonic Scales of Japan pp. 153-66 in Michael Hewitt, *Musical Scales of the World* (The Note Tree, 2013).

Figure 4.38: *Job* Scene V – bar 565Figure 4.39: *Job* Scene V – bars 566-7

Following this introductory bar, both oboes and cor anglais play a homophonic, chromatically-inflected motif (figure 4.39) composed of three ascending triplet quavers, followed by four straight descending semiquavers and a dotted crotchet. This motif is played three times to begin with, creating a sense of ebb and flow as the musical motion gathers speed and intensity, and then seems to pause, owing to the successive rises and falls in pitch and the increase and then stasis in harmonic rhythm; perhaps this depicts Job re-running the events of his dream in his mind, before coming to the realisation that his children are gone. The longer held notes at the end of the second and third statements of the oboe and cor anglais motif are overlaid with a homophonic triplet semiquaver circling motif (figure 4.40) in the clarinets and bass clarinet.

Figure 4.40: *Job* Scene V – bars 567-8

The end of the third statement of the oboe and cor anglais motif is extended, and the chords formed by the three parts sounding simultaneously ascend up scalically through a major sixth. Underneath this progression, the bassoons and muted violas play a new motif (figure 4.41), which the bassoons then repeat a second time on their own, before the solo first bassoon plays a final rising and falling phrase, landing back on G.



Figure 4.41: *Job* Scene V – bars 570-1

Bar 576 marks the start of the funeral cortège of Job's sons and their wives. The music falls down into a tonal area bearing the hallmarks of D minor, as the timpani and pizzicato double basses play an unceasing crotchet tonic pedal, like a tolling funeral bell. The first three bars collapse the musical landscape in on itself, as Job's world collapses around him, with contrary motion between descending lines in the flutes, and an ascending scale in the violas (figure 4.42).



Figure 4.42: *Job* Scene V – bars 576-8

The compression effect generated by the contrary motion at the start of the funeral

cortège ties this moment to those rendered with the same technique in scenes VI (the moment at which Job finally curses God), VIII (the moment at which Satan's victory is revealed to be false), and IX (the close of the work leading to the confirmation of the global resolution of G minor into B♭ major, chaos into order). From bar 579, the flutes play a rhythmically augmented version of the oboe and cor anglais motif from the scene's opening, while the viola line descends once more, and the second horn plays a tonic pedal. At bar 581, the cellos and first violins (and then violas too at bar 582) play a figure which derives from the opening ascending motion of the viola and bassoon line at bar 570, and then the circling motif of the clarinets and bass clarinet – here this is rhythmically augmented and more drawn out (figure 4.43). At bar 583, the bassoons play their previous motif, and again this is followed by the first bassoon solo phrase which brings the music back down to land on D once more.

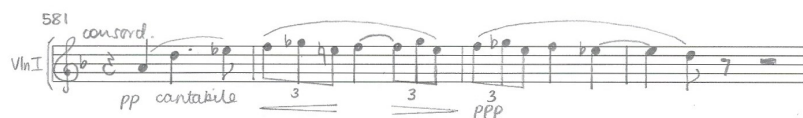


Figure 4.43: *Job* Scene V – bars 581-4

The texture is drawn in towards the centre again, as at bar 576, but here for only two bars before the flute motif starts again. Again this is followed by the cellos, first violins and then also violas, but here their material is altered, with quicker repetitions of the triplet circling motif; this is followed by the first bassoon and solo first oboe playing the bassoon motif, but here this is cut off after the first phrase by another drawing together of the musical landscape, this time with the descending line in the flutes mirrored in inversion in the trumpets. After two bars, the flutes play their motif, but only once, before the violins, violas and cellos play a varied form of the circling motif which ascends up over four bars, the final bar (601) consisting of

the first solo bassoon phrase from bars 574-5, which is then echoed at a much lower pitch by the cor anglais, bass clarinet and third and fourth horns from the first beat of bar 602, and again from the third beat of bar 602 in the violas and cellos.

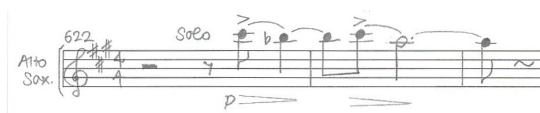
The next three bars provide transitional material as the focus shifts from the messages of destruction being delivered to Job, to his realisation of their reality. The solo first bassoon and solo first clarinet play fragments of by now familiar motivic material, before the solo first oboe plays an extended version of its opening cadenza, with two ascending scalar runs followed by two statements of the oboe and cor anglais motif from the start of the scene; the D pedal continues to sound, now in the form of tied semibreves, under all of this. At bar 607, this pedal takes on a new character as a minor seventh as the music returns to Job's F \sharp dorian mode dream theme from Scene IV. A spatial perspective encapsulates the superimposition of dream and reality encouraged by Vaughan Williams's scoring here: the melody is played by the violas, but the D \flat cello pedal and the final statement of the oboe motif, ending on C \sharp above, leave us in no uncertainty that dream and reality are now one and the same, they have been conflated into one 'truth', now fully revealed and apprehended. Vaughan Williams's score annotations state that 'Job still blesses God: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."'

From here we see Job's despair, reflecting plate 6 once more, and confirming the impression that Job's own suffering, and that of his children, are one and the same – another moment of spatial superimposition. However, Job still blesses God – represented aurally with the persistence of E major against its relative minor through to the end of the scene. At bar 611, Job's dream theme is reprised again, this time with a much denser homophonic texture in the violins, a counter-melody in the violas and half of the cello section, and a descending C \sharp minor scale bass line in the rest of

the cellos and double basses. At bar 616 the first, second and third horns echo the violin melody after two beats, and at bar 618, the violas and cellos echo the horns after two beats, with the viola line extended to bring the scene to a close on a semibreve E, leaving the tension between relative major and minor established throughout this section unresolved. In Scene IV, Vaughan Williams's notes on the score state that 'Producers who wish to follow Blake's order exactly can do so by making a pause at the double bar here [bars 492-3] and going straight on to Scene V.' Where this permissive re-ordering is followed, the performers are then instructed to move from the end of Scene V back to bar 493 and the remaining section of Scene IV, and then to pause at the end of this scene, before progressing on to Scene VI; this results in the portrayal of plate 4, and then plate 6, before plate 11, producing a closer parallel between plot and story.

4.3.7 Scene VI – 'Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth.'

Scene VI moves on to the three Dialogic Cycles of the *Book of Job*, and to Blake's seventh and tenth plates, illustrating the lack of sympathy, and ineffectual comfort, brought to Job by his three friends. Here, Satan introduces each of Job's comforters in turn (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar). They are described in Vaughan Williams's annotations as 'three wily hypocrites', and their dance is 'at first one of pretended sympathy. But [it] develops into anger and reproach.' This section of the music relates to Blake plates 7 and 10. Satan's presence is illustrated with his characteristic pairs of descending intervals, played pizzicato in the strings between the entries of each of the comforters; each successive pair of quavers forms a larger interval than the previous pair, and each of Satan's entries contains an extra pair of quavers (figure 4.44).

Figure 4.44: *Job* Scene VI – bars 622-6Figure 4.45: *Job* Scene VI – bars 622-4

The first of Job's comforters is depicted with a descending motif in the alto saxophone (figure 4.45); the second with a descending chromatic motif in the flutes, piccolo, oboes, cor anglais, clarinets and bass clarinet (figure 4.46); and the third with a longer, lower, and more pompous motif in the bassoons and contrabassoon (figure 4.47).

Figure 4.46: *Job* Scene VI – bars 624-5

Figure 4.47: *Job* Scene VI – bars 625-7**First Dialogic Cycle [Chapters 4-14]**

Eliphaz speaks first. He is certain that God does not punish the innocent, so Job must have sinned. He advises Job to repent, and return to his upright life. No man is greater than God; Job must keep his faith, continue to fear God, and thus he will prevail. Job defends his earlier outburst, highlighting it as evidence of the greatness of his grief. Again, he asks to die, for patience during suffering is impossible. He challenges his friends to show him what he has done wrong, because he cannot understand his predicament. How can a just God treat him so harshly when he has lived such a pious life? He starts to believe he must have sinned, although he does not know how, and asks God a multitude of questions.

Bildad replies, rebuking Job for his emotional volatility, and reinforcing Eliphaz' assertion: God is just, thus Job must have sinned to be tormented in this way. Punishment unprovoked by sin is impossible. Bildad implies that Job's suffering through the deaths of his sons may be attributable to their own transgressions. He asserts a universal truism of the faithful: the wicked will not be upheld, and the innocent will not be abandoned by God. If Job would simply repent, God would forgive him and return him to prosperity. Job despairs. It is not that he is unwilling to repent, rather that he does not understand how one can live a righteous life, if the life he has lived, in absolute piety, has been sinful. God is omnipotent, and Job is humble before him. He fears supplication would be futile, since he cannot repent for a sin which he does not know he has committed, and concludes that God must somehow punish the innocent. He is afraid, before the power and might of God, and knows that he cannot control what happens to him. He bemoans the lack of a mediator. He asks again to die, since through living a good life he has only ended up suffering, and he knows no other way to live. He asks for a short period of peace before the end.

Zophar chides Job, calling him a hypocrite. He says that Job has pleaded his innocence and righteousness, but that God's treatment of him is testimony to his sin. He restates God's omnipotence, and tells Job to repent and stay faithful and he will be restored. He reproaches Job for questioning God, and for trying to understand his actions, and suggests he deserves to suffer more for this distrust. Job responds: he is just as faithful as Zophar, he understands God equally. He reproaches the friends for questioning his piety, and asks them to be quiet. Rather than offering wise counsel, he feels they have simply mocked him, and thus they have been of no help to him. Maintaining his own integrity, Job asks God to hear him, he asks him not to turn away from him and leave him afraid. He wants to understand how he has sinned. He knows his purposes is to serve God, and says that he will answer when called. If all hope is lost, then he asks again only to die, so that his suffering might end.

Second Dialogic Cycle [Chapters 15-21]

Again, Eliphaz speaks first, reproaching Job for being self-righteous, and for thinking he is superior as a pious servant of God. He appeals to the wisdom of others, and

repeats the same dictum: only the wicked suffer, therefore, Job must be wicked. Hypocrites will be cast down. Job replies by calling the three friends 'miserable comforters': it is easy for them to speak this way when they are not in his position. He could reproach them if positions were reversed, but he would not, he would support them. They are not supporting him, they are simply making his suffering worse. His faith persists, but he cannot escape the feeling that God is attacking him for an unknown reason. He asks again to be relieved, for someone to plead his case before God, but he is losing hope.

Bildad asks in anger how long Job will continue to deny his evident sin, and why he treats his friends as stupid and of inferior faith. He describes the suffering of the wicked, as illustration of Job's predicament. Job wonders how much longer the friends will continue to torment him. He cannot comprehend why have they positioned themselves in isolation to him, rather than sharing his suffering, and helping to carry his burden. They continually accuse him of having sinned, but cannot show him what he has done wrong. Job feels he has been abandoned by all whom he knows and loves, yet his faith persists. Even if he is to die, he believes he will know God after death.

Zophar describes the fleeting prosperity of those who sin, which quickly turns to bitterness and suffering when they are punished by God: wicked men will not prevail under God, he will cast them down before their deaths. Job argues against Zophar, citing wicked men who have turned away from God, thinking they do not need him, but who nonetheless have escaped punishment in life, and have been spared from a painful, or drawn-out death. Job knows his friends think he must have sinned, so he doesn't understand why they try to comfort him. Their words are empty and have no meaning to him.

Third Dialogic Cycle [Chapters 22-27]

Eliphaz rebukes Job for protesting his innocence. He believes Job must have sinned, and suggests the sins of which he must be guilty, including self-righteousness, and believing that he can live wickedly and hide it from God. Eliphaz supplicates Job to atone for his sins and turn back to God, saying that he will then be forgiven and returned to prosperity. Job responds again that he wants to talk to God, but he cannot find him. Yet still he has kept his faith, always trusting that he is there, even though he lives in fear of God's awe and majesty. He wonders how the wicked sin seemingly without punishment, but reaffirms his belief that they will eventually receive retribution. Job challenges Eliphaz to demonstrate how he has spoken falsely.

Bildad simply reinforces God's greatness. Men can never be worthy of God, and in God's shadow, no-one can truly be righteous. Job responds by castigating his friends, they have never acted as righteously as they claim. Bildad's advice is useless to him. God is omnipotent and no-one can fully see him or understand him. Job will stay faithful until the death. He cannot be a hypocrite. Hypocrites are wicked and will not prevail. He maintains his own integrity and good conduct, in spite of the bitterness he currently feels. He discards his friends' counsel, dismissing it as nonsense, and describes again God's punishment of those who would sin.

A pause throughout the orchestra mid-way through bar 628 provides a moment of silence, before the first comforter's theme – developed from his entry motif – begins on the upbeat to bar 629. The laboured, chromatic melody, opening with a descending Satanic minor third and marked 'Andante doloroso', is carried here in the alto saxophone, and is accompanied by off-beat *piano* pizzicato notes in the second violins, violas and cellos, and off-beat *pianissimo* tenuto notes in the bass clarinet and bassoons. At bar 639, the second comforter's theme takes over, again developed from his entry motif, with the melody in the flutes, piccolo, oboes, and clarinets, and in a more fragmented form in the alto saxophone, bass clarinet, bassoons, third trumpet and violins. This is accompanied with staccato chords in the lower brass and pizzicato chords in the strings which outline the strong beats of the theme's rhythm. This section (bars 639-44) is then repeated. At the upbeat to bar 645, the third comforter's theme begins with the melody in the contrabassoon, first and second trumpets, trombones, and tuba. This is then taken up in the flutes, piccolo and double basses at bar 647, while the oboes, cor anglais, horns, violins, violas and cellos play a more static rising line moving from F# to G, to F# to G, to A and finally to B, with crescendi through each of these paired motions. Half-way through bar 650 it seems as if the theme is beginning again in all parts except for the trumpets, trombones and tuba, but after the first five quavers, the theme disintegrates into extended E-D trill-like figures, while the second part of the third comforter's motif is played by the trumpets and trombones. This pattern repeats again, but then at the third statement, the whole orchestra plays the theme in homophony, with a final two bars of semiquavers grouped in ascending threes pushing the music forward to a point of climax with the comforters' 'gestures of pretended sympathy'. At bar 658 the first comforter's theme returns in the alto saxophone, accompanied by off-beat

chords in the lower strings, and a gradually descending counter-melody for solo cello (figure 4.48).

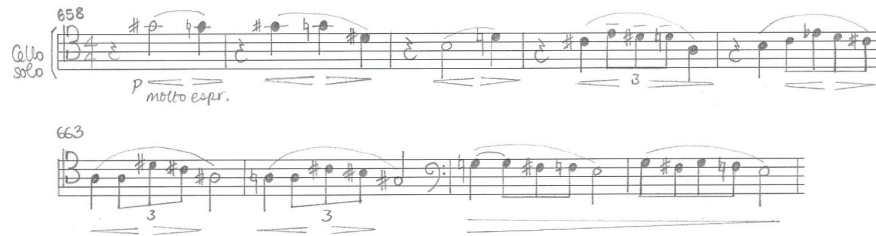


Figure 4.48: *Job* Scene VI – bars 658-66

Satan's characteristic motifs and the use of the E \flat saxophone demonstrate respectively that evil is still at work here, and that Job's dreams were indeed a vision from God. The 'Dance of the Comforters' also references plate 10: in this image the reader learns simultaneously that Job tries to remain faithful, while he is mocked and 'laughed to scorn' by the three comforters. This movement from plate 7 to plate 10 is effectively a continuation of the original Biblical 'story', since the three dialogic cycles are not illustrated in full in the engravings, and are represented with an even greater degree of refraction in the musical score.

Here then, it makes narrative sense to move on (in biblical terms) to Job's Closing Monologue, or back (in the order of the Blakean plates) to plate 8, in which Job curses God and comes closest to abandoning his faith.

Job's Closing Monologue [Chapters 29-31]

Man must fear God above all else. Job longs for the days when he could see God, and did not suffer. He looks nostalgically to the past, to his former prosperity, and to the affection and respect he enjoyed from those around him as he led them in living righteous lives; this stands in stark contrast to the pain, bitterness and loneliness he now feels. He perceives that those who held him in high regard now look down on him, flee from him, abhor him. Again he questions how he can have sinned, describing several possible options which would indeed be deserving of punishment, but of which he cannot be guilty. He demands that God answer him.

This next section recalls the compression of the musical soundworld in towards a central point from Scene V, as Job appeals to heaven: ‘Let the Day perish wherein I was Born’. A bright C major chord gives way to Lydian mode inflected descents in the flutes, oboes, clarinets, horns, first and second trumpets, first trombone and violins, and ascents in the bass clarinet, second and third trombones, violas and cellos (upper divisi parts). Tonic and dominant pedals in C major ground the music through the bassoons, contrabassoon, timpani, lower divisi cellos and double basses. The inward compression created by contrary motion at this moment is inflected with Job’s bitterness at the deaths of his children (from Scene VI), and a spatial perspective allows the reader to take some comfort in the reminder that Satan’s downfall is aurally certain (Scene VIII), and Job will be restored (Scene IX). Rhythmically, the close of Scene IV is recalled through the interpolation of the descent motif originally heard at bar 553; here it is used in its original form of a minim tied to the first of three triplet crotchet beats, and in a slightly varied form in which the minim is replaced by two straight crotchets.



Figure 4.49: *Job* Scene VI – bar 675

This latter form of the descent motif comes to dominate the texture in a particular melodic casting (figure 4.49) moving from tonic to $\flat 3$ and down through 2 and $\flat 2$ back to the tonic, so rising and falling through a minor third, an interval heavily associated with Satan across the whole work. This version of the motif is first heard in the flutes, first clarinet, second and fourth horns, and first violins, at bar 671, and from there it moves through various other parts, before being taken up

by the bassoons and all strings in unison octaves at bar 675. From this point it is continuously repeated for the following fifteen bars with doubling: in the bass clarinet, contrabassoon and tuba (bar 677); in the oboes, bass clarinet and second horn (bar 680); in the flutes, oboes, cor anglais and second horn (bar 681); in the oboes, cor anglais, first clarinet, first and third horns, and first trumpet (bar 682); and in the second oboe and cor anglais (bar 683), as ‘Heaven gradually becomes visible, showing mysterious, veiled, sinister figures, moving in a sort of parody of the Sons of God in Scene I’.

Half-way through bar 675 the trombones play an ascending fanfare phrase (figure 4.50) which outlines a C major triad; the tonic is further affirmed through similar phrases overlapping in the cor anglais, clarinets and horns at bars 678-80, in the trumpets at bars 679-81, in the contrabassoon, trombones and tuba at bars 680-2, and with a prolonged tonic pedal roll in the timpani throughout this section.



Figure 4.50: *Job* Scene VI – bars 675-8

At bar 684, following a thinning of the texture, a fall in tessitura and a drop in dynamic level from *forte* to *piano*, the trombones play their fanfare motif once again, as the intensity starts to build up again, with a strong C major chord in the upper woodwind at bars 686-7, and doubling of the C minor string motif in the bass clarinet, contrabassoon and tuba. The fanfare motif is then taken up in the cor anglais, clarinets, and horns from bar 687, and the trumpets from bar 688, before a homophonic rendering of the string motif across almost all of the orchestra moves through the chord progression C major – E \flat major – D major – D \flat major three times.

This cyclical chord sequence is cut off with a solo Tam Tam strike at the beginning of bar 693, which resonates for two beats before the orchestra enter, including the organ (for its only appearance in the work⁵¹), with a *fortissimo* A major chord, directing a swift change of focal plane to Heaven. The subversion and triumph of evil represented by a vision of Satan in God's rightful place, 'enthroned, surrounded by the hosts of Hell', is depicted with a chromatically descending sequence of chords (figure 4.51), which lands back on A major for a single quaver beat, pinning down a tonic triad pedal in the trombones, tuba, timpani, organ and lower strings, before a series of paired quavers repeatedly moving up a perfect fourth and down a tone in the violins (tremolo), clarinets, oboes and flutes rises out of the texture and prepares another tutti A major chord.



Figure 4.51: *Job* Scene VI – bars 693-6

This is followed by a similar chromatically descending chord sequence, moving through E major, E \flat major, C \sharp major (with added minor sixth) and C major (with added fourth) before falling back onto A major once more. Again a tonic triad pedal

⁵¹The role of the organ here is akin to that in the third movement of *Sinfonia Antartica* (1949-52), where it similarly appears as if from nowhere with a strikingly triumphal homophonic statement; we might also draw paratextual parallels with the organ roles in the finale of Camille Saint-Saëns's *Symphony No. 3* (1886), and the final movement of Franz Liszt's *Faust Symphony* (1857).

underpins an exact repeat of the rising sequence, this time landing on a tutti C \sharp major chord. This is followed by chordal motion through C major, A major, G \sharp major, E major and E \flat major, which precedes a general pause between bars 700 and 701. The composer's notes on the score indicate that the 'Vision of Satan on God's Throne' should parody the second and eleventh plates of Blake's *Illustrations*. This idea of parody encourages a spatial perception of this part of the scene, through which the homology between Satan and God, enthroned in Heaven and surrounded by the hosts of hell, or the angels, and placed above Job and his devoted family (plate 2) is strikingly illuminated. Musically, the breakthrough of A major at bar 693, followed by its subversion through moves away to E \flat major and C major/minor, depicts this acknowledgement of God in Heaven (A major having been established as the key of Heaven in Scene I), and Satan's attempts to challenge him.

At bar 701, Satan rises from God's throne and stands before Job and his friends, who 'cower in terror'. A tutti *fff* C major chord gives way to a chromatic descent in pitch, combined with a thinning out of the texture, and gradual diminuendo. In this final closing section of Scene VI, the ascending fanfare motif (originally heard in the trombones), both original versions of the descent motif (minim tied to the first of three triplet crotchets, and two straight crotchets, the second of which is tied to the first of three triplet crotchets), and the altered version of this latter form moving from C to E \flat and down through D and D \flat again, are interwoven, recalling the primary symbols of Job's despair at his predicament, as the vision of Satan gradually disappears. The reference to plate 11 is slightly more obscure; the motifs which represent Job's despair at the suffering of his family (the vision he experienced during his uneasy sleep, and his realisation of the significance of this portent, represented in plate 11) are recalled as the scene draws to its close, encouraging more emphatic perception on the part of

the reader of Satan's responsibility for Job's suffering.

4.3.8 Scene VII – 'Ye are old and I am very young.' / 'Then the Lord answered Job.'

Scene VII continues with the 'story', moving on to Elihu's Speeches, implicitly including the Poem to Wisdom, and Blake's twelfth plate for 'Elihu's Dance of Youth and Beauty', and then to God's Speeches and Blake's thirteenth plate, in which God answers Job 'out of the whirlwind', and fourteenth plate, in which God is praised by the Sons of God, for the 'Pavane of the Heavenly Host'.

Elihu's Speeches [Chapters 32-37]

The three friends have nothing more they can say, because they cannot convince Job he has sinned. Elihu (another friend of Job's, previously unmentioned and presumably not present) then intervenes. He has waited until now to speak, out of respect for Job and the three friends who are his elders. He now speaks because he vehemently disagrees with their counsel: the friends should not have condemned Job, simply because they could not explain his suffering given his piety, and Job should have justified God, rather than defending his own actions. Elihu asserts that God often punishes the wicked in ways that are more painful than death, and that he uses suffering in order to reveal his wisdom to the faithful. Elihu describes a loving, rather than a cruel and harsh God, and further elaborates God's justice, which he feels Job has misrepresented. He illustrates God's justice in relation to his interaction with mankind, and his majesty and power in the prosperity and beauty of the natural world. He concludes by instructing Job to stand back and survey God's kingdom before him.

[Poem to Wisdom [Chapter 28]]

[True wisdom, the only kind which could ease Job's plight, comes only from God.]

God's Speeches, with Job's Responses [Chapters 38-42:6]

After Elihu's lengthy speech, God answers Job 'out of the whirlwind'. This reminds Job of his humility before God's greatness, power, and responsibility. God charges Job with speaking without true knowledge, and challenges Job with a series of questions concerning God's creation of the world which demonstrates his limited understanding. He concludes by repeating his invitation to Job to try to answer him. Job is overwhelmed, and admits his shortcomings: he will no longer presume to answer God.

God challenges Job a second time: if he could demonstrate the same power and majesty as are characteristic of God, God would allow him to save himself. God shows Job Behemoth, an ox-like beast, and Leviathan, a sea monster. Only God has the power to create and control such chaotic beings; it is thus futile for Job to question his power and authority. Job replies with humility and devotion. He is fully

aware of God's omnipotence. He confesses that he proclaimed things which he did not know or understand, but having now heard and seen God, he repents that he questioned him.

Throughout the *Book of Job*, the reader becomes increasingly aware of Job's desire for a mediator to assist him in communicating with God. This constitutes an epitomic image of our own quest for understanding the unknown; we subconsciously seek points of resonance between aspects of our own existence and that of others. As spatial readers, we are able to understand that the concept of an intermediary who acts as a catalyst in enabling the subject (Job) to identify with and define himself in relation to the Other (God) is itself functioning as a myth; Job's ultimate mediator, Christ, is rendered human in order that ordinary people might recognise themselves in his image, and thus recognise the unknown (God) in terms which they are able to understand. Christ does not act as mediator between man and God; rather through the idea of Christ, man is able to mediate his experience of the unknown. During the second dialogic cycle, Job articulates a well-known Messianic prophecy:

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:
And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:
Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.⁵²

This emphatic affirmation of faith forms the foundation of the soprano solo 'I know that my redeemer liveth' in Handel's *Messiah* (HWV56), the opening aria of the third part of the work which annunciates a new theme – the victory of the Messiah over death itself. Job is absolutely assured that his redeemer – God made man – will eventually stand beside him and vindicate his faith; he looks forward to finally seeing God at this moment. Christian theology understands this statement to refer to the

⁵²*Book of Job*; 19:25-27.

resurrection of Christ, and the ascension to Heaven of the dead. The spatial paradigm draws all of these images and the temporally distanced Job, Christ, and the modern reader into the same plane, allowing the allegory perfect illustration. For the purpose of the Job narrative, Elihu functions as an interim mediator-figure; he appears to correct the advice of the three comforters, and enables Job to move closer to seeing God, as Weltzien writes, ‘Elihu becomes a calming voice, not a figure of wrath, as he guides Job toward a new potential life [...] Later, Elihu instructs Job on his journey into and out of captivity.’⁵³ Elihu himself refers to the coming of Christ:

If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness:⁵⁴

The spatial interpretative perspective allows the reader to quilt the figure of Elihu with the Messiah whose coming he foretells; if the myth of the mediator is conceptualised in terms of function rather than personified, Elihu and Christ are two manifestations of the same idea. We might read a complementary allusion to this idea in Blake’s twelfth plate: here, Elihu stands before Job and his comforters with arms outstretched, in a cruciform stance.

‘Elihu’s Dance of Youth and Beauty’ is reminiscent of the rhapsodic opening of *The Lark Ascending*; a solo violin plays a cadenza as Elihu enters (as in Blake plate 12), which leads into a rubato, wandering melodic line featuring large ascending and descending sweeps, and an irregular phrase structure, with only minimal harmonic

⁵³Weltzien, ‘Notes and Lineaments’, 327.

⁵⁴*Book of Job*; 33:23.

support from muted chords in the violas and cellos.⁵⁵ There is some disagreement among scholars over this resemblance: Kennedy dismisses it, writing that ‘the accompaniment to this seraphic passage is light and cool, but the violin’s notes are warm and vital, quite unlike the remoteness of *The Lark Ascending*, with which this passage is often misleadingly compared. The quality of string tone is quite different’;⁵⁶ while Dickinson accepts the similarity, though the reference confuses him, ‘after the aural stress of Scene 6, this *Lark Ascending* touch is perplexing, since it is intelligible neither to the biblical student nor, on the whole, to the Blake student. The latter will recognise the starry vault; but he will find the rescue “from the pit” missing, or at least very lightly acknowledged in this sudden transformation.’⁵⁷ Kennedy’s reservations over the ‘quality of string tone’ aside, Elihu’s theme is melodically and metrically (in its lack of rigid metre, and fluid phrase structure) similar to the opening of *The Lark Ascending*, and for this descriptive purpose I have used the comparison here. I would offer a riposte to Dickinson’s confusion: as observed by Gilbert, in the period following the Great War, artists were compelled to abandon the traditional redemptive conceptualisation of death, and now invoked the pastoral as an elegiac mode of mourning in response to catastrophic loss and tragedy;⁵⁸ interpreted spatially

⁵⁵This cadenza also brings to mind the solo violin passages in Symphony No. 3 (1922), particularly in the third and fourth movements; and the expansive, lyrical solo violin overlays in *Sancta Civitas* (1923-5) under the text: ‘And I saw a new heav’n and a new earth; for the first earth and the first heav’n were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I saw the holy city coming down from heav’n prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, having the Glory of God. And her light was like unto a stone most precious even like a jasper stone clear as crystal and had twelve gates, and on the gates twelve angels, and the twelve gates were twelve pearls; and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty is the temple of it’, following fig. 35, and later ‘And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they shall need no candle; for the Lord God shall give them light. And they shall reign for ever and ever’, at fig. 47.

⁵⁶Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 224.

⁵⁷Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams*, 351.

⁵⁸Gilbert, ‘“Rats’ Alley”’, 183.

then, this reference to *The Lark Ascending* stands simultaneously as a testament to the loss of innocence involved in this transition, and a stark indication of the distance traversed from this once familiar position. The composition of *The Lark Ascending* neatly encompasses the Great War itself: finished in 1914, yet not premiered until 1920, the work itself exists as a conflation of pre- and post-War pastoral imagery. The quilting of Elihu, in his role as (albeit temporary) mediator between Job and God, with this double conception of the ubiquitous musical pastoral trope encourages the spatial reader to engage with the pre-war nostalgic pastoral, acknowledging and then ultimately dismissing this as a vision of the distant past, and coming to recognise it as a more pleasant alternative to the still echoing horrors of the Great War, the ‘pit’ from which we must attempt to ‘rescue’ ourselves. We are by no means offered this rescue; rather what is conveyed here is the invective actively to engage with the world in order that we might achieve it ourselves.

Elihu’s theme (figure 4.52) reaches two points of climax towards the end of its original statement; these points, at which the melody line reaches its highest note (top Eb), are preceded by a *poco allargando* and diminuendo to *ppp*, and are articulated with harp and double bass chords.

Handwritten musical score for Violin Solo, Job Scene VII, bars 716-755. The score is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The score begins with a 'Violin Solo' instruction and a 'pp' (pianissimo) dynamic. A 'Cadenza' is indicated between bars 716 and 717. The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Bar numbers 716, 717, 723, 729, 734, 739, 744, 747, and 752 are marked at the beginning of their respective lines. The score concludes with a 'ppp' (pianississimo) dynamic marking.

Figure 4.52: *Job* Scene VII – bars 716-55

The secondary theme of this section begins at bar 756 for solo A clarinet (figure 4.53), accompanied, in a similar fashion to the opening theme, by sustained chords – here played by the bassoons and harp.



Figure 4.53: *Job* Scene VII – bars 756-9

At bar 763, the violins repeat the first four bars of the secondary theme, but now centred on F \sharp and starting on the final quaver beat of the preceding bar, rather than the fourth quaver beat of the bar. Out of this the solo violin line continues alone, over minimal chordal harmony in the lower strings and harp, and the tonal landscape is twisted with chromatic inflections, eventually creating the feel of B minor, but with a strong articulation of $\hat{3}$.



Figure 4.54: *Job* Scene VII – bars 777-80

The ‘Pavane of the Sons of the Morning’ enacts the scene depicted in Blake plate 14: ‘Heaven gradually shines behind the stars. Dim figures are seen dancing a solemn dance. As Heaven grows lighter, they are seen to be the Sons of the morning dancing before God’s Throne.’ The first section of the pavane theme (figure 4.54) resembles a chorale; is written in a stately $\frac{4}{4}$ and bright G major, and its homophony (I-ii-I-IV-I / I-V-I-IV-I-V-I) is played by the flutes, cor anglais, clarinets, bass clarinet,

bassoons, harps, violas, cellos and double basses, with its rhythm and harmonic outline accentuated by the timpani. The first four-bar statement of the theme (melody + homophonic harmony) is answered on the dominant by the violins, which leave their inverted dominant pedal and recall the descending motif which illustrated Satan's departure and the descent down from Heaven back to Earth (figure 4.14) in a two-bar rhythmically diminished version of this material, which rapidly falls and then rises again through two octaves, centring on the dominant (figure 4.55).



Figure 4.55: *Job* Scene VII – bars 780-3

This echoes Satan's exit from Scene I, and prefigures his ultimate downfall in Scene VIII. Here, modal inflections – representing Satan – are eventually eliminated through the dominating G major of the pavane; Satan is aurally subordinated.

The second four-bar melodic phrase of the pavane theme (figure 4.56) features a more rapidly changing and explorative harmony, tonicizing the flattened dominant (D \flat) - (I – ii – I – IV – VI – II – VI – ii – I – II – VI – II – VI – ii – I – ii – \flat V). The violin pedal moves up from the dominant (D) to the sub-median (E), and again, the final bar is overlaid by an altered version of the descending motif in the violins; here the first set of triplet quavers is melodically inverted, and the whole line falls and rises again twice over the three bars.



Figure 4.56: *Job* Scene VII – bar 783

At bar 789, the first phrase of pavane theme is stated again, now in D \flat major, with the inverted pedal in the violins sustaining not the tonic, but the local dominant. The homophony here emphasizes D \flat major, before tonicizing its sub-median (B \flat - the global flattened median of the G major pavane) and can be summarized as: I-IV-VI-II-I / I-V^{sus4}-I-IV-I-II-VI. The violins respond this time with a two-bar version of the descending motif, the first triplet figure rising up to the new local tonic, before the line falls and rises again onto a dominant pedal in this new key. At bar 794, an extended version of the second phrase of the pavane theme begins, now in B \flat major. This time, the homophonic texture affirms the local tonic (I-v⁷-vi-VII-I-IV / I-V/IV-I-IV-I-V/IV), before tonicizing E major via the local flattened sub-median (in B \flat major: I-V/IV-I-IV-I-ii - the supertonic here is the flattened sub-median of the new local tonic). The inverted violin pedal switches to the new local tonic at bar 797 over the following harmony (in E major): I - V - I - \flat VI - i - V. In the following bar the tonal focus shifts again, marking the start of a drawn-out return to the global tonic of G major. This return is not easily achieved, and indeed, is thwarted by interrupted cadences before the final emphatic affirmation of G major. In bar 798, the re-tonicization of G major is suggested by the articulation of its sub-dominant (in E major: I - i - \flat VI - \flat III - \flat VI; in G major, the last three of these chords are IV - I - IV). This creates a plagal cadence into bar 799, which itself represents the preparation (I - VII - \flat VI - v⁷) of what should be a perfect cadence back into the global tonic; however, this is thwarted as the music lands on chord VI (E major) in the next bar. This anticipation and failure to resolve is repeated over the following two bars, before a tonic pedal in most of the cellos, the double basses, timpani, third trombone, tuba, and contrabassoon; triumphant G major scales in the rest of the cellos, violas, first and second trombones, trumpets, horns, bassoons, bass clarinet,

clarinets, and cor anglais; and finally a perfect authentic cadence in the global tonic at bars 805-6 restore G major fully and bring the scene to its end.

4.3.9 Scene VIII – ‘All the Sons of God shouted for joy.’ / ‘My servant Job shall pray for you.’

Scene VIII continues the representation of God’s Speeches, and the allusion to Blake’s fourteenth plate with the ‘Galliard of the Sons of the Morning’, but after a short detour in which we circle back to the fifth plate to recall Satan’s previous departure from God (implied in the biblical Prologue) immediately before he is cast out of Heaven once and for all, as in the sixteenth plate (implied in the Epilogue, but never stated explicitly).



Figure 4.57: *Job* Scene VIII – bars 812-5

In the space of the first eight bars of the scene, Satan claims victory over Job/God - depicted with the characteristic descending intervals (in the clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoons, contrabassoon, trombones, tuba, and strings) and rising minor third fanfare motifs (in the flutes, oboes, cor anglais, horns and trumpets) which accompany his entry to the stage - which is then shown to be false (bars 812-15) through the use of a repeating motif (figure 4.57), with contrary motion between the wind, first and third horns and trumpets, and the second and fourth horns and violas, collapsing the texture in on itself and compressing the soundworld to connote Job’s

suffering, and his ultimate restoration through persistent faith. The following five bars provide a transition into the start of the Galliard of the Sons of the Morning, in an exact repetition of the 'All that he hath is in thy power' motif from Scene I (figure 4.5), representing the departure of Satan from Heaven as in Blake plate 5, and the return here of God. As before, the music falls through just over two octaves before rising up again, with a syncopated, dragging rhythm, through an Am⁷ chord, to lead into the next section with a perfect cadence tonicizing D major.

The Galliard starts at bar 821, marked 'Allegro pesante', and accompanies the Sons of the Morning as they 'drive Satan down', as in Blake plates 5 and 16. Its theme is in D major and binary form; the phrase structure may be summarized as A: 5+4+5+4 bars, B: 5+4+9 bars. The A section melody is played by the first and second trumpets, and first and second violins; this is accompanied by chords (with a rest on the strong beat of every bar, except the six and fifteenth bars) in rhythmic unison in the clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoons, contrabassoon, harps, and lower strings. The second half of each phrase is emphasized by doubling of the melody by the oboes, cor anglais, and third trumpet. At bar 839, the contrasting B section begins, exploring the supertonic and relative minor keys before re-affirming D major. Here the melody of the first phrase is played by the first and second violins, and horns, with the second half doubled by the cor anglais; the melody of the second phrase is played by the first and second violins, first and second trumpets, flutes and oboes, and harmonized in rhythmic unison by the cor anglais and horns; the melody of the final nine-bar phrase is played by the first and second violins, violas, cellos, horns, first and second trumpets, cor anglais, oboes and flutes. The whole of the B section is accompanied in a similar manner to the A section with chords in rhythmic unison in the lower strings, harps, lower brass and lower woodwind. At bars 857-60, two

F minor chords, falling to D major (a retrospective glance) and D minor (looking forward) respectively, provide a transition into the next section of the dance.

This secondary section, commencing at bar 860, is more developmental in character, with much less evidently delineated thematic units. The oboes, first and second horns, and first and second trumpets play a *piano* four bar dotted rhythm motif (figure 4.58), while the bass clarinet and strings play a more static counter-melody in octave unison (figure 4.59), whose syncopation in the second half conflicts with the rigid first beat of the bar emphasis of the oboe, horn and trumpet phrase.

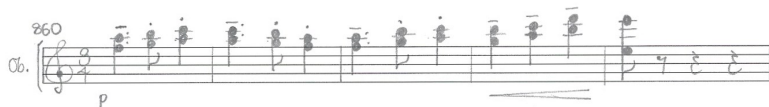


Figure 4.58: *Job* Scene VIII – bars 860-4



Figure 4.59: *Job* Scene VIII – bars 860-3

This is followed by a new three-bar rise-and-fall phrase in the cor anglais, clarinets, bass clarinet, third and fourth horns and violins which grows from the rhythmic cell of the opening bar of the preceding oboe, horn and trumpet motif, and then turns into a descending line (figure 4.60), with a complementary dynamic swell. Underneath this, the tuba and lower strings play straight tenuto crotchets.



Figure 4.60: *Job* Scene VIII – bars 864-6

Next is a varied repeat of the two F minor chords and their respective falls to D

major and D minor, followed by a reprise of the oboe, horn and trumpet motif, now with clarinets instead of the horns, and with two bars added to the end of the phrase. Following this is an extended version of the motif, which now occupies six bars, and is played by the oboes, cor anglais, horns and violins, with accompaniment from the tuba and lower strings. At bar 882, a new ascending motif (figure 4.61) is played by the cor anglais, clarinets, bassoons, second violins and violas; this is then taken up, with an additional bar at the end, by the flutes, piccolo, oboes and first violins at bar 885, to prepare Satan's downfall.



Figure 4.61: *Job* Scene VIII – bars 882-4

As a whole, the Galliard offers aural reflection of plate 14 once more, and Heaven finally takes control of the various satanic elements of the musical language – epitomised in the faster, triple metre dances – before Satan is finally cast out of Heaven for good at bar 890. Three chords here depict the scene as ‘Satan falls out of Heaven’, as in Blake plate 16: B \flat major – C major – D major. The orchestration of these chords is based around contrary motion between the flutes, piccolo, oboes, cor anglais, clarinets, trumpets, second trombone, violins and violas (descending), and the bass clarinet, contrabassoon, horns, first and third trombones, tuba, cellos and double basses (ascending). There is a pause on the last chord as the curtain falls and the lights go to blackout onstage before the final thirteen bars of the Galliard. This section – strongly reminiscent of the high strings soaring over triumphal brass in similarly charged triple metre D major passages in the final movements of the Fifth and Eighth Symphonies, and melodically similar to the (albeit slower) D major scalar

quadruple metre theme in the final section of *Flos Campi* – features the combination of a new rhythmic motif, in the bassoons, contrabassoon, trombones, tuba, cellos and double basses (figure 4.62), with an altered, homophonic version of the first two phrases of the original Galliard theme (preceded by a four-bar introductory phrase), in the flutes, piccolo, horns, trumpets, violins and violas. The ending of the second phrase is altered, using a hemiola in the final two bars to lead into the next section of the scene.

Superimposing the moment of downfall depicted in plate 5 onto the ultimate fall from Heaven depicted in plate 16, within a spatial paradigm, reveals a subtle difference between the two plates, which is also implied aurally: in plate 5, Satan ‘falls’ down out of Heaven onto the Earthly plane inhabited by Job and his family, accompanied by the descending ‘All that he hath is in thy power’ motif, which occupies five bars; in plate 16, he falls through the centre of the frame and down to the bottom margin, suggesting that he has been banished not only out of Heaven, but also from Earth, to the underworld, accompanied by accented contrary motion through a rising major third chordal progression across the whole orchestra, simultaneously compacting and resolving Satan’s evil into a bright D major chord in the space of a single three-beat bar. Satan’s first and second falls are thereby conflated, and spatially, the first fall becomes effectively as complete as the second, since we are aware that Satan will inevitably descend to the underworld. Musically, the combination of the descending ‘All that he hath is in thy power’ motif with which Satan takes control, with the rising D major resolution in which he loses it, creates a sense of equilibrium; the two falls thus cancel each other out, and balance is restored.

The image displays a musical score for Job Scene VIII, covering bars 891 to 903. The score is written for four string instruments: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Cello (Vc.). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo and dynamics are marked as *ff marc.* (fortissimo marcato). The score is divided into three systems. The first system (bars 891-895) shows the Violins and Viola playing a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the Cello plays a more rhythmic pattern. The second system (bars 896-900) features a more complex texture with the Violins and Viola playing sixteenth-note passages, and the Cello providing a steady accompaniment. The third system (bars 901-903) shows the Violins and Viola playing a final, sustained chord, while the Cello continues its rhythmic pattern.

Figure 4.62: *Job* Scene VIII – bars 891-903

At bar 904, the curtain rises for the Altar Dance and the first section of the biblical Epilogue.

Epilogue: Job's Restoration [Chapter 42:7-17]

God reproaches Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar because they do not mirror Job's faith and devotion, and because they gave unwise and false counsel. He instructs them to offer a sacrifice, and to ask Job to pray for them. The three friends do as they are instructed. God restores Job's health and prosperity. His acquaintances return to him, comforting him and offering him gifts. He lives a long life, with abundant livestock, three more beautiful daughters, and seven more virile sons, and dies happy after one hundred and forty further years.

Vaughan Williams' annotations on the score state: 'Enter (on earth) Young men and Women playing on instruments; others bring stones and build an altar. Others decorate the altar with flowers'; this represents the final illustration in Blake's series. At this moment the 'plot' moves out of line with the 'story' once more, jumping to plate 21, in which Job is shown surrounded once more by his family, friends, and animals, restored to prosperity; this thereby casts the final scene in its epilagic function. For this section the music returns to an 'Allegretto tranquillo', pastoral-sounding g and G minor. A second inversion tonic pedal in the strings underpins the first seventeen bars of this section, and then continues for a further ten bars in the cellos and horns. The lyrical, lilting melody is rhythmically reminiscent of the pastoral dance of Job's family in Scene I, and consists of two phrases, the second of which is identical to the first except for the first bar.

The melody is passed between different instruments: first the oboes and cor anglais, outlined and harmonized in dotted crotchets by the first harp (phrase 1 (figure 4.63): bars 905–8); then the clarinets, outlined and harmonized by the first and second harps, bassoons, cor anglais and second oboe (phrase 1: bars 909–12); then the flutes, outlined and harmonized by the first and second harps, bassoons, clarinets, second

oboe and cor anglais (phrase 2 (figure 4.64): bars 913-16); then the oboes and cor anglais, outlined and harmonized by the first and second harps, bassoons, clarinets, and flutes (phrases 1 and 2 together: bars 917-20).



Figure 4.63: *Job* Scene VIII – bars 905-8

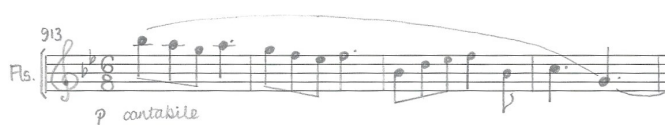


Figure 4.64: *Job* Scene VIII – bars 913-16

The return to the global tonic of G minor conflates the image of Job at the start of the narrative with that of Job in his newly redeemed state; this quandary is resolved in the spatial paradigm which conceives of every state of Job synchronically. The pious, but ultimately sinful, Job is always already redeemed, and the redeemed Job is shaped by his faith and his suffering; the incongruity here between the apparent narrative resolution brought about by reference to the final Blakean plate but the lack of tonal resolution inherent in the return to G minor, as opposed to the bright B♭ relative major in which the work will eventually come to its close, suggests that this scene only prefigures the ending, rather than constituting it itself.

After the first section of the Altar Dance, the plot returns us to the narrative sequence of the story and to plate 18, which shows Job praying (at God's instruction), for his three friends; the caption in the lower margin suggests that it is this selfless action which results in Job's redemption, 'And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his Friends.' At this point (the upbeat to bar 921) the strings

reprise Job's dream theme (originally figure 4.32), now a tritone lower than in its original statement, as he blesses the altar. A spatial interpretation here might suggest that Job is experiencing another revelation from God at this moment; Job has realised the potential that he always contained within to overcome his fear (from Scene IV), and seen God. Here he blesses the altar, even more devoted to God than before as his identity becomes quilted with that of Elihu and Christ, an interpretation implied by the parallel drawn between Job's cruciform stance in Blake's eighteenth plate and Elihu's similar physical positioning in the twelfth plate. The G minor string pedal is sustained here only by the cellos, but it is also taken up in the horns, and complemented by pizzicato G minor arpeggio figures in the double basses and first harp. Over the top of this, the flutes and clarinets play the first phrase of the altar dance theme, which is then echoed by the oboes, cor anglais and bassoons. The second phrase is then played in canon by the oboes, cor anglais and bassoon starting on the first beat of bar 929, and the flutes and first and second clarinets starting half a bar later, creating a sense of continuous falling motion.

At bar 934 'The Heavenly dance begins again, while the dance on earth continues': Heaven is represented by the clarinets (both to start with, and later just the first), bassoons (to start with), horns, trumpets, timpani, harps, violas (to start with), cellos (to start with), and double basses (to start with); while Earth is represented by the flutes, piccolo, oboes, cor anglais, clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoons, contrabassoon, glockenspiel, violins, violas, cellos and double basses. The Heavenly dance is an altered reprise of the G major Pavane of the Sons of the Morning theme, while the Earthly dance continues from the previous section with the Altar Dance melody and Job's dream theme. At bar 941 the music drops into D \flat major; here Job's dream theme is taken up by the bass clarinet, bassoons, contrabassoon, tuba,

violas, cellos, and double basses, while the altar dance melody is played by the piccolo, oboes, clarinets and glockenspiel, and two bars later by the flutes and violins. The Pavane theme is suggested, rather than stated explicitly, in the horns, trumpets and first harp, and then from bar 943 onwards in the lower strings, and in bar 944 in the clarinets and bassoons. At the upbeat to bar 945, a G major version of Job's dream theme moves to the oboe, cor anglais, violins and violas, and the altar dance melody is played by the bass clarinet, bassoons, contrabassoon, tuba, cellos and double basses.

At bar 947, the music moves into the Mixolydian mode centred on E; during the following six bars the Pavane, altar dance and Job's dream themes are developed and become fragmented, with scalar figures interpolated in the horn, trumpet and harp parts during the last three bars to lead into the closing section of this scene. The final nine bars (953-61) feature a tutti G major chord with flattened sixth (E \flat) in the bass, moving through a sparser G major chord with B \flat in the bass (in the trumpets, trombones and tuba only) to a G and G \flat false relation (in the contrabassoon, trumpets, trombones, tuba, timpani and double basses); this is followed by another tutti G major chord, this time with a flattened fifth and flattened sixth added, moving through a similarly sparse G major chord with B \flat in the bass, to an octave unison G. The final climax of the scene happens at the blackout on stage in bar 957, with a *fff* cluster chord (E \flat , G \flat , G \sharp , B \flat , B \sharp , D \flat), followed by a B \flat major chord, and three consecutive bars of octave unison G, articulated with a dynamic swell and closing the scene *piano*; cataclysmic chaos has been restored to order.

4.3.10 Scene IX – ‘So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.’

Scene IX – the completion of the biblical Epilogue, and the Epilogue to the ballet – proceeds (segue from Scene VIII) in line with Blake’s narrative, depicting plates 19, 20, and finally 21 again. Plate 19 shows Job and his wife sat under the oak tree, humbled at the arrival of their friends, who offer gifts of money. Plate 20 celebrates the beauty of Job’s daughters; interestingly, Job’s physical stance in this image, with his arms outstretched, mirrors that of God in the picture on the wall behind him. The musical composition of the Epilogue encourages spatial perception, suggesting that the three plates alluded to in this scene are to be heard together, rather than in chronological sequence: Job’s theme (already linked with plate 1, and therefore, by association, with plate 21) occupies the string soundworld almost all the way through, while the pastoral motif, descending chromatic triplet figure, and motif outlining $\hat{5}$, $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{4}$ are interpolated above. The Epilogue is described in Vaughan Williams’s score thus: ‘Stage lights up again shewing [*sic*] the same scene as the opening. Job an old and humbled man sits with his wife. His friends come up one by one and give him presents.’ The G from the end of Scene VIII is tied over forming a segue transition into a reprise of Job’s theme from the very opening of the work (previously figure 4.1); this is played by the violins, violas and cellos (muted) from bar 962, and also the bass flute from bar 965. At bar 969 the first clarinet, first horn and third horn reprise the pastoral motif (previously figure 4.3), and at bar 971, as ‘Job stands and gazes on the distant cornfields’, the woodwind begin to reprise the material which originally represented Job’s lands, leading into the descending chromatic triplet figure. Half-way through bar 974, the violas and cellos start to play Job’s theme again, followed by

the violins in octaves at the start of bar 976. In bar 977, the violas start to reprise their rising quavers, grouped in fours but starting on the second crotchet beat of the bar; this pattern is picked up in fragments by the cellos over the next four bars, while the second flute and first bassoon play the pastoral motif again. At bar 982, the bass flute and second violins reprise the motif outlining $\hat{5}$, $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{4}$ (previously figure 4.5), as the first harp and cellos play groups of four ascending quavers forming chains of perfect fifths. There is no big point of climax at the end of the scene, since this movement is simply an epilogue, or coda to the work as a whole. Instead, the final few bars feature contrary motion scalar figures throughout the orchestra, closing the texture in on itself, and bringing the music to a close on a B \flat major triad, sustained in the strings, and then dying away onto a single B \flat note in the cellos and double basses under a ‘very slow curtain and black out’. The resolution of G minor into its relative major affirms the sentiment of the end of Scene VIII: cataclysmic chaos has been restored to order.

Dickinson propounds a blunt and unimaginative reading of the end of the work, motivated by a dominating temporal-teleological paradigm under which the repetition of material at a later stage of the work represents the composition of a section of musical material which must then be compared back to, and by definition distinguish itself from, the original material. He writes:

For the Epilogue, Job is simply restored as he was. There is no element of transformation [...] The return to earlier motifs in the Epilogue must be taken as a last glance at a reformed Job, disciplined and ready for the future, and freed by hard experience, fearless and unperplexed. But there is no sign of any difference in the music. Blake’s purpose is apparent in the merry noise of wind and harp genres that replaces, in the mind’s ear, the initial and typically unmusical observance of the written religious code. This is entirely disregarded in the easy satisfactions of thematic recovery, here employed to place the drama in a final mood of pure, unprogressive contemplation. The composer drops back to the biblical Job, made

wise the hard way, as his scenario reference to an ‘old and humbled man’ betrays.⁵⁹

Weltzien observes that although the material reprised here from the opening of Scene I ‘sounds the same’ as at its original appearance, ‘we hear it differently through the virtual time of the preceding forty minutes of music’;⁶⁰ this provides unwitting vindication of the spatial perceptual model: where Weltzien refers to ‘virtual time’, he is actually describing the spatial moment in which the music of the opening and that of the Epilogue are drawn together and interpreted in light of one another. The spatial analytical model simultaneously circumvents and resolves the inherent obstacle in Dickinson’s interpretative approach; by removing the ‘earlier’ and ‘later’ temporal qualifiers from the instantiations of Job’s thematic musical material, the reader is free to observe the potential for redemption in the Job of the work’s opening, and acknowledge that the redeemed Job at the close of the work is in fact that same man, as illustrated (as Dickinson quite correctly observes) by the aurally identical signifiers. Contrary motion in the last few bars of the scene quilts Job’s redemption (confirmed aurally with the global resolution of G minor into its relative major) with his prior suffering, and with the falseness of Satan’s victory over Job and against God, and his downfall; this brings the work to its close with a neat symmetry of story and plot.

⁵⁹Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams*, 347-352.

⁶⁰Weltzien, ‘Notes and Lineaments’, 314.

4.4 Epilogue to the Analysis: *Job* as a Modernist British Pastoral

To the imaginative listener, the modern pertinence of this sense of an inexorably linked defeatism and nemesis is most overwhelming [...] It is left to the spectator to work out what the faith of the enlightened twentieth century means in terms of decisive struggles. – A.E.F. Dickinson.⁶¹

The inherent potential for richer new understandings of Vaughan Williams's *Job: A Masque for Dancing* is realized in just one form through the foregoing spatial analytical investigation of the work, its paratexts, and its contexts. The scope of this reading is broadened by the important shift of focus that it represents away from Vaughan Williams' ballet music as some sort of culmination of extant renditions of the Job mythology, and away from the idea of the biblical *Book of Job* as its singular, authoritative, progenitorial instantiation. Additionally important is the pinning of the reading to the central position of the spatial reader, whose active engagement with the mythology and its musical illustration is paramount in determining the tenor of the interpretation. The reading provided in this thesis develops a new line of scholarship on characterisation in the Job mythology, based on the greater interpretative potential of one which is not prohibitively tied to individual physical figures; namely that the various personas might be mapped as manifestations of different aspects of human experience. The spatial frame within which the narrative plays out synchronically allows the simultaneous perception of Job as an ordinary human, living a faithful life but suffering affliction and distress; leading others in pious devotion to God, yet undergoing such personal adversity as compels him to question the nature of his

⁶¹Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams*, 351-7.

faith. Greater nuance than is evident in extant understandings of the work is enabled through the paratextual mapping of plot and story, which highlights specific features of Vaughan Williams's musical language and formal design that contribute to: a redefinition of the roles and relationship of God and Satan; the protean portrayal of Job as 'everyman'; the confirmation of the false victory of evil; the depiction of the inevitability (in Christian doctrine) with which the blindly arrogant will eventually be rendered contrite and humble; and ultimately to our understanding of our own engagement with the Job mythology, through which our experience, whether we feel some affinity to the Christian, or any other, religion, or none, is itself mediated.

Analysed under the spatial interpretative framework of this thesis, Vaughan Williams's *Job* emerges as a definitively modern pastoral work, since its function as a response to the abandonment of faith in the period following the Great War, and its darkly modern post-war pastoral character are clearly evident. But can it legitimately be called *modernist*? As the foregoing analysis illustrates, interpretation from a perspective which prioritises the quilting of narrative moments under a spatial paradigm, rather than their causal succession within a chronologically-devised temporal progression, renders the reader able to engage with the work as a response to the condition of modernity, one which rejects traditional teleological narratives and promulgates a definitively modernist pastoral trope. If we adopt Whittall's recommended focus on 'the way in which [the depiction of the pastoral] is musically achieved',⁶² rather than simply the content of the pastoral imagery, we might view Vaughan Williams' incorporation of Renaissance dance forms and masque elements, his intelligent combination of diatonic and modal musical language, and his deliberate

⁶²Whittall, 'The Signs of Genre: Britten's Version of Pastoral', 363; quoted in Saylor, "'It's not lambkins frisking at all'", 39.

disruption of the chronological ordering of the Job narrative through motivic, timbral, and thematic reference as well as a deliberate deviance from the causal succession of the biblical book and the Blakean engravings, as a compelling indictment of the complacent nostalgia of pre-war society. In this way we might begin to read *Job* as the source of a simultaneously cathartic (in its reconceived pastoral function as mourning elegy) and motivating (in its spatially-shaped presentation of the restored Job's utopian existence as a better alternative to the present, rather than a lost, better past) artistic engagement, one which might, following certain definitions and ultimately at the discretion of the individual reader, be appropriately termed 'modernist'.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the non- (and in many cases anti-) religious nature of modernist art in the inter-war years may be seen as a reaction against a God who had allowed the incomprehensible devastation of the Great War to occur. It is also possible to read such works as deliberate critiques of religious belief from alternative, non-monotheistic perspectives. The *Book of Job* raises profound questions as to the nature of faith, and the relationship between human and God, and while not explicitly anti-religious, both Blake's *Illustrations* and Vaughan Williams' *Job* draw these issues into sharp relief, particularly when interpreted in concert with one another, and with the extra-musical context in which the ballet music was composed, and in which it has since been received across the remainder of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.⁶³ As Dickinson astutely observes, it is the individual reader's prerogative to engage with the foundational Job mythology, mediated here through its musical expression, and further by spatial interpretation which quilts it with aspects of its extra-musical context, including

⁶³Of the eighty-three years since *Job*'s composition, few have been free from large-scale political and military conflict.

numerous potential paratexts; this in turn allows the critical mediation of the reader's experience of life and faith (or absence thereof) in their own particular context.

Chapter 5

Sea Orpheus: Reflections on Global Existence in the Twenty-first Century

Sea Orpheus [...] is dense and will require a lot of concentration. It's a serious piece. As a composer you have to bear witness to what you've experienced, to your own life experience and to the people who are listening. Any structure [in the music] has to make sense to the ear. – Sir Peter Maxwell Davies.¹

5.1 Introduction

The idea of confrontation between, and conflation of, the past and present in a single artistic moment has characterized the music of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies since at least the late 1960s. Similarly extrusive in his compositional output over the past forty years, and undoubtedly at play in the work to be investigated here, is what Whittall describes as the ‘confrontation between an uninhibitedly expressionistic rhetoric and a meditative lyricism that seems, at its most characteristic, to be striving for an unattainable stability and serenity.’² What follows in this last case study chapter is a spatial examination of one of his late instrumental chamber works, which, unlike *King Priam* and *Job: A Masque for Dancing*, was composed solely for performance in the concert hall, unconnected with any dramatic or danced stage presentation. The present study extends the exercise of applying spatial analytical

¹Peter Maxwell Davies, in conversation with Pierre Ruhe, ‘Preview: Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and Peter Maxwell Davies’ new “Sea Orpheus”’ *ArtsATL.com*, February 2, 2010. Available online at: <http://www.artsatl.com/2010/02/coming-this-week-orpheus-chamber-orchestra-and-peter-maxwell-davies-new-sea-orpheus/>

²Whittall, *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century*, 375.

techniques to instrumental music, with no accompanying dramatic spectacle, in which the mythological narrative is hidden far deeper below the musical surface. What emerges from the analysis of this piece, in distinction to the other case studies, is evidence that the spatial analytical framework might just as productively, and successfully, be applied to music with a more ‘abstract’ conception, that is to say works which present a very different illustrative relationship between mythological material and musical narrative realization, one in which the mythological content may well seem to be obscured behind a complex compositional screen. The relative brevity and streamlining of this final study, necessitated by restrictions of length and scope, but additionally appropriate to the work’s comparatively recent genesis, nonetheless demonstrates the intriguing and path-breaking insights to be gained from even a more ‘light-touch’ application of the spatial methodology to works with at least some semblance of a connection with ancient myth, extending the potential reach of the framework. Having firmly established the fundamental premises of the methodology within the previous chapters, the associated emphasis on transformation is crystallized here through the sharply focussed discussion of the work and its central paratexts.

5.1.1 Peter Maxwell Davies’s *New Brandenburg Concerto*

In 2006 the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra commissioned a set of six chamber works that would engage from a contemporary perspective with Bach’s *Brandenburg Concertos* and that would encourage a spatial re-hearing of contemporary music through this eighteenth-century filter:

Through the New Brandenburg Project, we hoped to pay tribute to this set and contribute to a living repertoire for chamber orchestra. Additionally, we wanted to unearth a variety of new perspectives on the Brandenburg Concertos and a familiar framework in which listeners could relate to new music. To reflect the artistic debate and experimentation that is the spirit of Orpheus, we commissioned six diverse composers in succession, each of whom was asked to use one of the Brandenburgs as a departure point.³

There was only one, simple prescriptive condition for this project: Each composer had to use the same instrumentation as the Bach model with which they were provided.

Completed in 2009, Peter Maxwell Davies's *Sea Orpheus* had its public premiere on 6 February 2010. However, it was not performed as part of the set of *New Brandenburg* concertos until 6 May 2011 at Carnegie Hall, New York. The programme for this occasion did not follow the mirrored sequence of the original Brandenburg Concertos (i.e. running in numerical order from No. 1 to No. 6), featuring the six new works in the following order: Aaron Jay Kernis, *Concerto with Echoes* (paired with Brandenburg 6); Melinda Wagner, *Little Moonhead* (paired with Brandenburg 4); Peter Maxwell Davies, *Sea Orpheus* (paired with Brandenburg 5); Christopher Theofanidis, *Muse* (paired with Brandenburg 3); Stephen Hartke, *A Brandenburg Autumn* (paired with Brandenburg 1); and finally Paul Moravec, *Brandenburg Gate* (paired with Brandenburg 2). Whatever the reason(s) behind this programming decision, the ordering here, combined with the decision to commission six different composers to create the *New Brandenburg* concertos, serves to underline the fact that Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* were not composed as a deliberate set, as confirmed by Werner Breig:

³'Orpheus Chamber Orchestra: The New Brandenburgs' *WQXR.org* (6 May, 2011) Available at: <http://www.wqxr.org/#!/story/11020-orpheus-chamber-orchestra-the-new-brandenburgs/>

There is little sign that Bach carefully planned the assembly of his various sets of concertos. Certainly the Brandenburg Concertos (which were put together in a presentation score in 1721) form a collection of the usual scope of six pieces and although we can describe them as an instantly recognisable and 'meaningful set',⁴ they lack at least one of the characteristics of a planned collection, namely, diversity of tonality. The fact that two of the concertos are in F and two in G major suggests that, whatever the purpose for which Bach collected this group of works together, they were originally independent pieces.⁵

Further elaboration of the rather arbitrary grouping together of the *Brandenburg Concertos* is offered by Michael Marissen:

The currently favored view in scholarly writing on J.S. Bach's *Six Concerts avec plusieurs Instruments* dedicated to the Margrave of Brandenburg is that they represent less a meaningful set of concertos than a collection of individual, unrelated works in the genre. On the face of it, the reasons for this view would appear uncontroversial. Each of the concertos in the collection calls for a different scoring, and, equally significant, the tonal structure (F-F-G-G-D-B \flat) conforms to no clearly recognizable scheme. Furthermore, the concertos share neither the same number of movements, nor the same stylistic orientations. We might conclude from this, as well as from the fact that secondary copies of earlier versions to some of the concertos survive, that the concertos were probably composed over an extended period of time.⁶

Maxwell Davies's work's title is taken from a poem by his late Orcadian neighbour, George Mackay Brown, and the composer confirms the presence of the poetic imagery in his work: 'I dedicated "Sea Orpheus" to his [George Mackay Brown's] memory. The poem is very close to me. I was living on Hoy with the sea lashing all the time. He was a close friend. This poem brings out sea imagery, lapping waves [...] and Orpheus and Eurydice [...]'.⁷

⁴Cf. Michael Marissen, 'J. S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos as a Meaningful Set', *Musical Quarterly* 77/2 (1993), 193-235.

⁵Werner Breig, 'The instrumental music', *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, ed. John Butt (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 133.

⁶Marissen, 'J. S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos as a Meaningful Set', 195.

⁷Maxwell Davies, in conversation with Ruhe, 'Preview: Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and Peter Maxwell Davies' new "Sea Orpheus"'.

5.1.2 Orpheus and Eurydice, and George Mackay Brown

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice elaborates the narrative tropes of the tragic death of a young lover, and human fallibility. Orpheus loses his new bride Eurydice to a snake bite and, after mourning her death and finding no solace for his grief, he travels to the underworld to try to rescue her. He supplicates to Hades and Persephone, King and Queen of the underworld, singing to them – and the rest of the underworld’s inhabitants – of the magnitude of his love for Eurydice, and appealing to their custodianship of the dead by arguing that after a few more happy years together, they will return to Hades permanently. The gods of the underworld are so moved by the beauty and elegance of Orpheus’ music and rhetoric that they agree to grant Eurydice’s release, on the condition that Orpheus trusts their word, and does not turn back to see whether Eurydice is following him until they are both back in the living world. Orpheus obeys and makes the long and arduous climb back up out of the underworld, never looking back until he reaches the light when, fearing for his wife’s safety, he turns to see her slip away once more, for she has not yet reached the safety of the living realm. George Mackay Brown’s poem retains the essential narrative event of the death of Eurydice, conflating her original and subsequent second passing into one, elongated scene of drowning. The Greek underworld is re-envisioned as an unforgiving, watery grave, and, crucially, Orpheus himself is not obliquely present in the poem’s language; his presence is purely implied by the title and imagery.

5.1.3 Application of the Methodological Framework

As opening gambit, I offer an important observation from James Hepokoski on the crucial presence of paratextual paraphernalia in the reader’s interaction with purely

instrumental musical works which at first glance might seem to stand apart from any sense of a dramatic narrative. Hepokoski's hypothesis is formulated around programmatic music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but I would argue that it is just as relevant to the work under scrutiny here, and indeed that its basic premise is extremely broadly applicable.

As Genette has argued with regard to literature,⁸ titles (and other paratextual material) are attempts by the author to set up the framing conditions of a text's reception; they condition the way in which the text proper is to be perceived. As part of the game of reading,⁹ involving the calling forth of some sort of 'meaning' from a text (which, when lacking an established principle of interpretation, is normally capable of multiple readings), the reader is encouraged to interpret the text on the basis of the generic or descriptive implications of an overriding title.¹⁰

Unlike Genette and Hepokoski, I am not at all concerned with the agency of the composer in 'set[ting] up the framing conditions of a text's reception', or in 'condition[ing] the way in which the text proper is to be perceived.' My own conceptualisation of the interpretative process, as set out in the preceding parts of this thesis, differs slightly from Lyotard's idea of a 'game', but the interactive, dialogic nature of this characterisation, along with the emphasis on potential hermeneutic variance and enigma, is shared by the interpretative model expounded in the present study. Accordingly, the influence of the primary paratextual material – in this case, the work's title, and the poem cited by Maxwell Davies as its point of inspiration – on the shape of the reader's interpretative space, is of crucial importance.

⁸Gérard Genette, 'Structure and Functions of the Title in Literature' [1987] trans. Bernard Crampé *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1988), 692-720.

⁹Cf. Jean-François Lyotard's concept of agonistics – an adaptation of Wittgenstein's theory of language games – as elaborated in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* [1979], trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 10-11, 16-17.

¹⁰James Hepokoski, 'Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero? Strauss's *Don Juan* Reinvestigated', *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work*, ed. Bryan Gilliam (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 136.

Hepokoski continues, reassuring us of the ease with which we are able to investigate any given work in these terms, once we have accepted the conceptual frame within which it should be read:

The relevant issues here may initially seem to be more problematic, because the paratext employs a mode of discourse (verbal) other than that of the text proper (musical), but in fact the differences are slight. The abstract problem of whether music actually can evoke nonmusical images is utterly irrelevant – and perhaps meaningless – when posed in these terms. Instead, the problem should be grounded in an actual sociohistorical system of production and reception conventions. Within such a system it would suffice that both the producer and the targeted receivers of the musical text agree that forging musical and literary-pictorial interrelationships is fully within the spirit of the game, even if it might be a ‘controversial’ game that any given individual might not care to play.¹¹

Here he is ostensibly describing the strenuously, inescapably interactive nature of the reader’s engagement with the musical work, the ‘game’ of interpretation. Within this dialogic mode of involvement with the work, Hepokoski identifies useful questions to ask of it, which point to aspects of the spatial analytical technique offered here: ‘Are the musical and verbal planes of narrativity, both accepted here as givens, to be forced into an inevitable parallelism, or may they occasionally work at cross-purposes?’ That is to say, how might we describe the mapping of story and plot throughout the work, and what are the hermeneutic implications of the identifiable points of synergy and deviation between the two? ‘Can (or must) the music drop out of the narrative at certain points for such “purely musical reasons” as the traditional requirement of formal recapitulation?’¹² Translated into the language of the spatial analytical framework, this question points to the potential interpretative consequences of the agglomeration of musical and narrative form, and the relative balance between the

¹¹Hepokoski, ‘Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?’, 136.

¹²Hepokoski, ‘Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?’, 138.

competing demands of their respective shapes; for example, the effect of points of reprise on the reader's comprehension of the narrative.

5.2 *Sea Orpheus* and its Paratexts

The paratextual sources to be considered as comparators in the spatial analysis of Maxwell Davies *Sea Orpheus* include Mackay Brown's poem, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Bach's fifth *Brandenburg Concerto* BWV 1050. The other five *New Brandenburg* concertos will not be treated as paratexts for the purpose of this investigation since as with the original set of *Brandenburg Concertos*, their connections to the work in question, and to each other, are effectively arbitrary. In consigning these works as existing beyond the scope of the present study, I am deliberately bypassing Hepokoski's directive to acknowledge the presence of seemingly superficial and imposed paratextual apparatus – these works stand as paratexts simply by virtue of their mutual genesis in the *New Brandenburg Project* and the reader's knowledge of this fact – partly as a matter of pragmatism, but also in view of Martin Geck's injunction that Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* may only properly be understood through individuated, rather than collective, study.¹³ While no doubt an interesting avenue for further study, detailed analysis of these additional five Brandenburg responses would offer too much material for integration into the space available in the present work, and the potential to afford too much significance to aspects of their potential collective identity would detract from the desired emphasis on Maxwell Davies's *Sea Orpheus* as a twenty-first-century *mythological* artwork, rather than its connection to Bach.

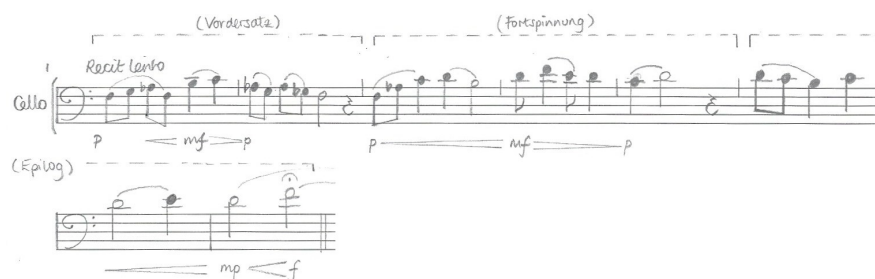
¹³Martin Geck, "Gattungstraditionen und Altersschichten in den Brandenburgischen Konzerten" *Die Musikforschung* 23 (1970), 139-52, 139.

5.2.1 Bach's Fifth *Brandenburg Concerto* as Musical Paratext

Bach's fifth *Brandenburg Concerto* takes its instrumental configuration from the concerto grosso model, with solo violin, flute, and harpsichord. The *New Brandenburg Project* stipulated that Peter Maxwell Davies must retain this instrumentation for his commission; the composer also chose to broadly emulate the over-arching formal structural design and proportions of Bach's work, notwithstanding some subtle modifications. The three-movement structure of Bach's concerto – adopted by Maxwell Davies but with segue transitions between the interlocked movements, rather than moments of silence between three distinct parts of the work¹⁴ – mirrors the design of Bach's own important paratext, the concertos of Antonio Vivaldi, as does the internal ritornello technique. Bach, rather unusually, employs this formal device in all three movements of the concerto, and this constitutes the only instance of Bach's use of ritornello form in a slow movement and provides an example of concertato fugue, in which the ritornello material is treated to characteristic fugal processes. On this level of internal structure, there is greater disparity between Maxwell Davies's design for *Sea Orpheus*, and the work's Bachian paratext, above all in the absence of ritornello form within the work's second and third movements.

The first movement of Maxwell Davies's *New Brandenburg* concerto does employ a recognisable ritornello structure, but one that bears marked differences from *Brandenburg No. 5*. Maxwell Davies' ritornelli are played by the ripieno ensemble, but not tutti until the very end of the movement, and the initial conventional alternation of ritornello and episode seems to break down approximately half way through the movement.

¹⁴This structural model will be examined in section 5.3.

Figure 5.1: *Sea Orpheus* – bar 1

Within the opening ritornello itself – the incipit of a plainchant version of *Tantum ergo sacramentum*¹⁵ (figure 5.1) – there are three constituent sections, which might seem to appeal to Fischer’s tripartite scheme,¹⁶ except that the final *Epilog* does not provide any sense of tonal closure. Bach himself, however, does not completely conform to the conventions specified in Fischer’s model, as Marissen observes: ‘In the fifth Brandenburg Concerto, the ritornello from the first movement (mm. 1-9) [(figure 5.2)] has clearly marked internal divisions, but they cannot precisely be characterized according to the terms of Fortspinnung-type syntax. The ritornello has what might be labelled Vordersatz (mm.1-2) and Epilog segments (in mm. 3-7 and 7-9), but there is no conventional Fortspinnung segment.’¹⁷

¹⁵ *Liber Usualis*, 1852 (Tournai, Belgium: Desclée & Co., 1953).

¹⁶ Cf. Wilhelm Fischer, ‘Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Wiener klassischen Stils’, *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft* 3 (1915), 22-33.

¹⁷ Marissen, ‘J. S. Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos as a Meaningful Set’, 218.

Figure 5.2: Bach, Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 – bars 1-9

Whereas Bach's subsequent ritornelli present essentially the same material, or portions thereof, in new keys related to the tonic of D major (*V* in A major (bars 19-20), continuing with *C* (bars 29-31); *C* in B minor (bars 39-42); fragment of *V* used cadentially (bars 49-50); *C* in D major (bars 58-61); *V* in A major (bars 101-2); *V* in A major (bar 110), *V* and *C* in D major (bars 121-5); *C* in D major (bars 136-9); and finally the full ritornello in the tonic to close the movement (bars 219-27)¹⁸), Maxwell Davies's further ritornelli subject the chant melody to a series of increasingly complex prolation canons.¹⁹

Something that sets Bach's fifth *Brandenburg Concerto* apart from his previous works, and from the other concertos in the set, is its foregrounding of a keyboard instrument as a prominent, if not principal, soloist. As Marissen highlights, the work marks a turning point in the genre, since for the first time here, the harpsichord is not fulfilling 'an exclusively servile function within the ensemble (i.e., it is present to provide harmonic and rhythmic support, not contrapuntal interest)'; rather it 'moves from its traditional role as continuo, to an obbligato role still somewhat overshadowed by the solo flute and violin, to an obbligato overshadowing the concertino, to a role completely overwhelming the full ensemble, and finally, to one that during the first section of the extended episode, in effect *becomes* the ensemble.'²⁰ The motivation behind this compositional choice remains somewhat ambiguous,²¹ however

¹⁸Abbreviations: *Vordersatz* (*V*); *Continuation material* (*C*) – in place of *Fortspinnung*.

¹⁹Further detailed analysis of the ritornello material will follow in section 5.3.

²⁰Marissen, 'J. S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos as a Meaningful Set', 210.

²¹Richard D. P. Jones suggests it was motivated by Bach's concurrent acquisition of a new harpsichord for the Köthen court (*Cf.* 'The keyboard works: Bach as teacher and virtuoso', Chapter 9 in *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, 142.); Alfred Mann attributes the instrumentation to a change in Bach's own role at this time, from violinist to harpsichordist (*Cf.* 'Introduction: Bach's Orchestral Music' in *Bach Perspectives 4 – The Music of J. S. Bach: Analysis and Interpretation*, ed. David Schulenberg (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 4.).

the significance of this development in Bach's compositional thinking should not be underestimated, as Malcolm Boyd attests:

The fifth Brandenburg Concerto occupies a special position in the history of the genre. Here, for the first time in a concerto, the harpsichord is elevated from the rank of continuo instrument to that of soloist. It would be inaccurate and misleading to call it a harpsichord concerto *tout court* – though the long and elaborate cadenza in the first movement underlines Bach's obvious intention to promote the harpsichord to a position of importance above that of the other soloists, violin and flute.²²

Maxwell Davies's *Sea Orpheus* arguably goes one step further, giving the piano soloist not one but two virtuosic solo cadenzas in the first movement. The etymology of the term 'concerto' variously invokes the concepts of competition, and/or striving (together) towards a common goal, (from *concertare*), and consorting (from *conserere*),²³ all of which are evident in the interplay between Bach's concertino and ripieno, and within the concertino group. Marissen additionally locates signs of competition in Bach's handling of melodic and rhythmic motivic material, and in the work's construction and resolution of tonal tension, writing that 'this remarkable, unprecedented (and unemulated) work appears to take one of the two "concerto" notions to its very limits.'²⁴

Further to Hepokoski's assertion of the interpretative potential of instrumental music detailed above, additional confirmation both of the definite possibility of the presence of inherent meaning in such works, and of the distinction between a composer's (lack of/subconscious/deliberate) possible projected hermeneutic content and the potential interpretations of the reader, is provided by Marissen's investigation of the *Brandenburg Concertos* as a coherent group of works:

²²Malcolm Boyd, *Bach: The Brandenburg Concertos* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 86.

²³Marissen, 'J. S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos as a Meaningful Set', 206.

²⁴Marissen, 'J. S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos as a Meaningful Set', 209-12

The present study assumes that even Bach's concertos can contain significant descriptive references and that these extramusical references are to be understood in the historical context of Bach's musical, religious, and social environment. In particular, it explores social implications of Bach's treatment in the Brandenburg Concertos of various instruments in relation to the hierarchical figuration of the eighteenth-century court ensembles for which these concertos were conceived. While Bach may not have always or ever consciously intended his concertos to be understood exactly as they are interpreted here, the allegorical worlds projected by the Brandenburg Concertos can be seen to bear some discriminating relation to the actual world of the eighteenth century; furthermore, baroque music theorists are in fact known to have discussed, at least in a general way, various sorts of analogies between politics and music.²⁵

Under the analytical framework of this thesis, the original and new *Brandenburg* works are drawn into consideration within a common interpretative space. Even without Hepokoski's identification of the hermeneutic potential of programmatic instrumental music, we might consider therefore the possibility of inherent meaning in Maxwell Davies's instrumental chamber music simply by virtue of the principles described by Marissen here.

5.2.2 George Mackay Brown's *Sea Orpheus* as Poetic Paratext

The central literary paratext for Maxwell Davies's *Sea Orpheus* is Mackay Brown's poem of the same name. Shetlandic cultural heritage was a long-held fascination for the poet, who was himself a native of neighbouring Orkney. He was particularly captivated by the enigmatic presence of elements of Greek Orphic mythology in the folklore of the Shetland Islands, and this variant on the archetypal narrative of a man pursuing a quest to regain his lost love was one to which he returned several times throughout his life. He wrote of the myth's existence in a Shetland ballad, 'there is a Shetland version of the Orpheus legend, but only a few enchanting fragments

²⁵Marissen, 'J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos as a Meaningful Set', 194.

survive; the original ballad must have been current when Norn was the language of the Shetlanders, and the chorus is still in the original tongue.’²⁶

The poem *Sea Orpheus*, from which Maxwell Davies’s *New Brandenburg* concerto takes its title, was first published in a selected collection of Mackay Brown’s poetry in 1971;²⁷ the poet later visited the Shetland Islands during 1988, a trip which resulted in another significant Orphic output – *Orfeo: a masque*.²⁸ *Sea Orpheus* clearly has its heritage in the Shetlandic variant of Orphic mythology, in which ‘King Orfeo’ of the ‘aste’ (East) loses his wife ‘Lady Isabel’ to a dart from the Fairy King which pierces her heart, while he is out hunting. In his grief, Orfeo turns to music, playing odes of sadness and of joy, and a reel which ought to heal a sick heart. He is invited in by an unidentified interlocutor, perhaps the equivalent of Hades and Persephone, and joins them, playing again on his pipes songs of grief and of celebration, and reprising the reel which ought to heal a sick heart. Having enchanted his audience, Orfeo is asked what he would like in return, and replies that he wishes for his wife to be restored to him. His request is granted, with no qualifying condition, and King Orfeo and Lady Isabel return home together to a life of prosperity:

²⁶George Mackay Brown, *Northern Lights* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999), 269-70.

²⁷George Mackay Brown: *Poems New and Selected* (The Hogarth Press, 1971).

²⁸George Mackay Brown, *Orfeo: a masque* (Wass, North Yorkshire: The Celtic Cross Press, 1995).

King Orfeo
A Shetland Ballad

I

DER lived a king inta da aste,
Scowan ürla grün [Early green's the wood]
Der lived a lady in da wast.
Whar giorten han grün oarlac. [Where the hart goes yearly]²⁹

II

Dis king he has a huntin gaen,
He's left his Lady Isabel alane.

III

‘Oh I wis ye'd never gaen away,
For at your hame is döl an wae.

IV

‘For da king o Ferrie we his daert,
Has pierced your lady to da hert.’

V

And aifter dem da king has gaen,
But when he cam it was a grey stane.

VI

Dan ne took oot his pipes ta play,
Bit sair his hert wi döl an wae.

VII

And first he played da notes o noy [grief],
An dan he played da notes o jov.

VIII

An dan he played da göd gabber reel,
Dat meicht ha made a sick hert hale.

IX

‘Noo come ye in inta wir ha’,
An come ye in among wis a’.

X

Now he's gaen in inta der ha’,
An he's gaen in among dem a’.

²⁹Unfortunately, the accuracy of this translation is in some doubt. However it is the only available translation of the refrain lines, and it has proven impossible to attempt my own translation using the one extant Shetland/Norn dictionary. However, since these lines are used simply as a lyric refrain, rather than contributing to the sense of the narrative, I hope that this does not present too much of a problem for the present purpose.

XI

Dan he took out his pipes to play,
Bit sair his hert wi döl an wae.

XII

An first he played da notes o noy,
An dan he played da notes o joy.

XIII

An dan he played da göd gabber reel,
Dat meicht ha made a sick hert hale.

XIV

‘Noo tell to us what ye will hae:
What sall we gie you for your play?’—

XV

‘What I will hae I will you tell,
An dat’s me Lady Isabel.’—

XVI

‘Yees tak your lady, an yees gaeng hame,
An yees be king ower a’ your ain.’

XVII

He’s taen his lady, an he’s gaen hame,
An noo he’s king ower a’his ain.³⁰

In Mackay Brown’s poem (and, as I will argue later, in Maxwell Davies’s music), however, the happy ending of the Shetland ballad is rejected in favour of a nautical re-envisioning of the myth’s better-known tragic conclusion: ‘Sea girls/Take this buttercup girl/To her salt bridal.’ In fact, the poet refers directly to the classical denouement in lines 27-9 – ‘A legend of resurrection/Among the spindrift’; in the poetic conception here, Orpheus is not even given the opportunity to attempt Eurydice’s rescue.

³⁰Anon., ‘King Orfeo’, *The Oxford Book of Ballads*, ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch (Oxford, 1910) - glosses in source.

Sea Orpheus

George Mackay Brown

A plough and barley fiddle
For one tide-raped girl
Sang in the looms of the sea.

Driftweed red as lashes
Scored the strings, seals
Clustered around (old salts
They swig shanties like ale,
They shine like bottles.)

The fiddle
Stretched one thin strand across
The warp of the ebb.

Eurydice
Caught in the weaving streams
Was half enchanted now
To a cold mermaid.

The Salt One
Turned the wave round. He gathered
The Song of the Five Seas
Into his loom – Suleskerry
Flashed a new eye, Ahab
Hailed Jonas across
Tumultuous whaletracks, gulls
Climbed up the Glasgow sky
Rivet in beak.

The Salt One
Had more to do than pity
A sinking month, or heed
A legend of resurrection
Among the spindrift.

The Salt One
Unrolled webs and bales
Above the drowning.

Sea girls
Take this buttercup girl
To her salt bridal.³¹

³¹George Mackay Brown, 'Sea Orpheus', *George Mackay Brown: Poems New and Selected*.

By far the most striking contrast between the poem and both the Shetland ballad and the most well-known ‘classical’ version of the narrative,³² lies in its characterisation. The poem’s focus is not on Orpheus, his grief and mourning for the loss of his wife, and the trials he endures as he attempts to rescue her, but, significantly, on Eurydice herself. Orpheus is absent from the spoken surface of Mackay Brown’s poem, appearing only in the work’s title, and indirectly – but persistently – through its imagery. References to instruments – ‘fiddle’ (lines 1 and 9), ‘scored the strings’ (line 5), ‘red’ (perhaps the C strings of a harp – line 4) – and singing – ‘sang’ (line 3), ‘shanties’ (line 7), ‘The Song of the Five Seas’ (line 18) – allude to Orpheus’ presence throughout the poem’s narrative. His fatal error of ‘looking back’ in the Greek version of the myth is alluded to in line 17: ‘The Salt One/Turned the wave round’ preventing Orpheus, already powerless, from pursuing his lost love in the watery depths.³³

Aside from Eurydice, the only other character mentioned in the poem who is traceable in the foundational mythology is Hades, presented here as the god of a watery underworld, ‘the spindrift’ and referred to as ‘the Salt One’. His identity is confirmed by the anaphora in stanzas 5-7; ‘the Salt One’ is the only character in the poem who exhibits any semblance of agency or control over its narrative events. His power is confirmed by the shift from past tense description throughout the poem to the imperative of the final stanza: ‘Sea girls [Persephone’s hand maidens and priestesses, with their traditional burial rite duties]/Take this buttercup girl/To her salt bridal.’

Further allusion to Hades’ presence in the poem as ‘the Salt One’ is provided

³²Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, discussed in section 5.2.3.

³³There is also a potential biblical reference here: Lot’s wife was turned to a pillar of salt as punishment for looking back.

by the profusion of agrarian imagery traditionally associated with Persephone – his wife – as daughter of the harvest goddess Demeter. These references – to agriculture, ‘plough’, ‘barley’ (line 1), ‘bales’ (line 31); and woven craft, ‘loom(s)’ (lines 3 and 19), ‘scored the strings’ (line 5), ‘stretched one thin strand across/the warp’ (lines 10-11), ‘weaving’ (line 13), ‘webs’ (line 31) – imbue the poem with the idea of craftsmanship and, in concert with the musical imagery, creative artistry. From a spatial perspective, these thematic ties draw together discrete moments in the poem’s narrative, writing myth’s characters into a frame of reference in which they variously interact with other figures – ‘Ahab’ (line 20 – the monomaniac sea captain from Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*), and ‘Jonas’ (line 21 – a transliteration of the biblical Jonah, of ‘and the Whale’ fame)³⁴ – and a definitive geographical space – ‘Suleskerry’ (line 19 – a small rocky island or reef with a lighthouse, uninhabited save for a ‘selkie’ (a seal-like mermaid creature!), located 60km west of the Orkney mainland), ‘the Glasgow sky’ (line 23 – perhaps a reflection in the River Clyde, connoting the shipbuilding industry, ‘rivet in beak’ (line 24); but also the child-like association of sky = up = north), and ‘the Five Seas’ (line 18 – the North Sea, the Norwegian Sea, the Pentland Firth, the North Atlantic, and Scapa Flow: the waters which surround the Orkney Islands).

The immediate environment of the poem’s narrative, always already present throughout its unfolding within the spatial paradigm, is the sea, depicted by Mackay Brown as a cruel and unforgiving entity, with its ‘tumultuous whaletracks’ (line 22). The poet’s language creates a strong and inescapable sense of the sea’s violence: Eurydice is described as ‘tide-raped’ (line 2), and words such as ‘lashes’ (line 4) and ‘scored’ (line 5), suggest physical abuse and pain quite separate from her actual death

³⁴This synonymy is confirmed in Mackay Brown’s audio recording of the poem, in which he pronounces ‘Jonas’ as ‘Jonah’.

by drowning – ‘cold mermaid’ (line 15), ‘buttercup girl’ (line 34 – literally the pale yellow flesh of the drowned corpse), ‘salt bridal’ (line 35). Mirroring both *King Orfeo* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the sense of Eurydice’s lack of autonomy is paramount, in fact it is drawn into even sharper relief here by the shift of character focus from Orpheus to Eurydice (as discussed above), and by the added sense of her naïvety, innocence and youth (indicated by the repeated use of the word ‘girl’); this serves to heighten the poem’s tragedy. Eurydice here is a ‘tide-raped girl’ (line 2), ‘caught in the weaving streams’ (line 13); she is dominated and overwhelmed by the sea, which is all-surrounding, it *looms*. Not only does ‘the Salt One’ not allow Orpheus the chance to attempt Eurydice’s rescue, but he also renders her death inevitable: ‘The Salt One/Unrolled webs and bales/Above the drowning’ (lines 30–2).

Mackay Brown’s poem combines and conflates imagery illustrating the sea, woven craft, and music, to poignantly beautiful effect, presenting a nautically figured pastoral elegy brimming with allegorical and hermeneutic potential. In their interaction with this work as an important paratext for Peter Maxwell Davies’ music, the spatial reader necessarily also engages with the poem’s own paratextual sources, primarily the Shetland ballad, and the classical mythological material.

5.2.3 Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as Mythic Paratext

While I employ Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* here as the exemplar paratext for the classical version of the Orpheus myth, it is avowedly not my intention (as explained in relation to the insignificance of chronological precedence to the spatial methodological framework of this thesis) to suggest that Ovid’s is in some way its original, or most authoritative manifestation; rather this is simply a matter of pragmatism, based on the reasonable hypothesis that the Ovidian epic contains the form of the myth with

which the majority of potential engaged spatial readers will be most familiar. Evidence to support this assumption is provided by E. J. Kenny, who writes:

No transformation recounted by him [Ovid] is as remarkable as this poetic miracle whereby legend after legend assumed for ever afterwards the form that he had chosen to give it. No doubt the powerful effect exercised by his poem on European writers and artists has been accentuated by the accident that much of the Greek literature which he laid under contribution has disappeared or is accessible only in second-hand or fragmentary form. One may suspect that even if it survived we should admire him all the more and that it would still be in their Ovidian guise that most of these stories would impose themselves on our imagination.³⁵

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice comes at the beginning of Book X of the *Metamorphoses* (the story of Orpheus' later life and death is told in Book XI). While Ovid's epic is primarily concerned with the concept of transformation, there is a strong preoccupation throughout its length with ideas of art and creativity, which is itself simply a transformation (of nature). Orpheus exists within the narrative as an example *par excellence* of a man who finds in art the power to overcome his own shortcomings and achieve the seemingly impossible. Ovid's portrayal of Orpheus is emphatically human, that is to say, he exhibits flaws and imperfections somewhat atypical for a legendary hero. Yet his musical panegyric on the intensity of his love for Eurydice, and the depth of his pain at her loss, demonstrates such artistic skill (through its compelling effect on the inhabitants of the underworld, and to the reader through Ovid's elegant and beautiful poetry) that we come to understand Orpheus' metamorphosis from a pitiful, sad figure, into a powerful, transcendent, musical orator. Under the spatial paradigm, Orpheus is (of course) always already both of these things, just as Vaughan Williams's Job is both complacent and enlightened, and Tippett's Priam is both powerful and impotent. Eurydice's return to the underworld results not

³⁵E. J. Kenny, 'Introduction', to Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: OUP, 2008), xxv.

from a lack in Orpheus' artistic skill, but from a combination of his loving concern and his lack of self-restraint – wholly human flaws which echo those of Priam (in loving his family above his city, and letting this dictate the choices he makes as King) and Job (in feeling the suffering of his family as his own suffering, and in allowing this to cause him to question his faith in God).

Hymen – the marriage god – is distressed (with unknown cause) as he presides over Orpheus and Eurydice's marriage rite; this presents a bad omen for their future. Shortly thereafter, as Eurydice is walking through the grass with the water nymphs, she suffers a fatally poisonous snake bite to her heel. Orpheus is distraught at her death, and after finding no solace for his grief in the mortal world, he embarks on a journey to the underworld to attempt her rescue from Hades. He supplicates to Hades and Persephone with beautifully sad music, singing of the tragedy that Eurydice has been taken at such a young age. He laments that his love for her is greater than his grief can abide, and appeals for empathy for the King and Queen of the underworld, alluding to the strength of their own love for one another. He asks that they might restore Eurydice to life, acknowledging that in the end they will both rightfully return to Hades' realm for eternity. Such is the anguish he currently endures that he asks to remain in the underworld himself should they not feel able to grant his request, because life without Eurydice is not worth living for Orpheus. His painful, exquisite music moves not only Hades and Persephone, but also numerous other inhabitants of their kingdom, and so Persephone grants Eurydice's release from death, on the condition that Orpheus not look back to be assured of her presence until they are both safely returned to the world above. The journey home is arduous and exhausting, and at the final stage, when the world of light is in sight once more, Orpheus' resolve fails, and he turns back, fearing for Eurydice's safety. She is instantly lost once more, gone

forever this time. Orpheus is overcome with grief, and begins to sing again.

David Adams Leeming cites the Orpheus myth as ‘the prototype of the tragic failure to follow the proper ritual and the resulting loss of the loved one who was almost saved.’³⁶ He relates Orpheus’ quest to the mythic trope of the descent into the underworld, explaining the allegorical function of this pervasive theme thus:

In the universal myth of the descent into the underworld the hero finds himself an explorer in the province of death itself. This is the continuance of the scapegoat process, in which the hero, as man’s agent, faces in depth what man himself so fears. The hero is our hope of overcoming death and understanding its meaning. Much of the underworld myth’s meaning lies in the fact of the hero’s return to the inner earth – to the natural mother. This is the stage of the germinating seed; the hero must spend the allotted time in the world womb before he can be born again in his role as divine hero who has truly broken through the local and material barriers of human life to become the Son of Man. The descent into the underworld is a rite of passage carrying the hero and man past the monster guardians of the higher truth which the underworld contains. As the voyager enters death’s kingdom, he leaves temporal and physical things behind, and he emerges later as literally a new being. The psychological reality behind this and all mythological processes is the process of self-realization. The voyage to the underworld is the “night journey” or “dark night of the soul” – the second and final stage of meditation. It is the *crucial* stage of self-exploration in the face of a life already lived. The hero is the archetype of the self, and, as Jung wrote, “the archetype of the self has, functionally, the significance of a ruler of the inner world, i.e. of the collective unconscious.” This sense of recognizing and retrieving the various parts of the self – the evil/good, flesh/spirit, light/dark – is at the very essence of the underworld myth.³⁷

This description highlights the mediating function of descent mythology in facilitating our acceptance of our own mortality, and further the capacity of mythological narratives in general to enhance our self-understanding through the mediation of aspects of human experience with which we are not easily otherwise able to cope. Perhaps the injunction not to look back might be interpreted as an allegorical

³⁶ Adams Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero*, 197.

³⁷ Adams Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero*, 213.

representation of the need to accept and move on from the death of a loved one, or the loss of a home:³⁸ after a suitable period of grieving and mourning, we must accept the loss and move forward, thereby allowing the one who has passed to live on in our memory. If we do not do this, and stayed locked in grief, always ‘looking back’, the cherished memory of the loved one becomes replaced by an impenetrable sense of sorrow at their loss, and then they are truly lost forever. Kenny defines the central theme of the *Metamorphoses* as ‘the microcosm of human psychology’, and demonstrates the work’s particular aptitude for mediation, ‘the *Metamorphoses* does not, like the *Aeneid* or the *Pharsalia* or the *Thebaid* (in their different ways), state a case; rather it asks questions, exploring and analysing for the most part without comment or commitment.’³⁹ In this way, the work encourages the reader to engage with its content, shaping their perception, but crucially leaving the particular and unique individuation of meaning up to each reader, in turn. By depicting a quasi-fictional ‘universe in which human beings, and more often than not the gods who are supposed to be in charge, are at the mercy of blind or arbitrary or cruel, and always irresistible, forces’,⁴⁰ Ovid renders these immensely challenging questions comprehensible to the reader, allowing them to engage with, and in some sense resolve, them at a safe distance.

5.2.4 *Tantum ergo sacramentum* as Liturgical and Musical Paratext

The final important paratextual source to be introduced here, *Tantum ergo sacramentum* is the incipit of the last two verses of a medieval Latin hymn written for the feast of Corpus Christi by St Thomas Aquinas: *Pange Lingua Gloriosi Corporis*

³⁸As with Lot’s wife.

³⁹Kenny, ‘Introduction’, xviii.

⁴⁰Kenny, ‘Introduction’, xviii.

Mysterium. The final two stanzas, which constitute the separable *Tantum ergo* section, venerate the act of transubstantiation, and are sung during the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church:

<i>Tantum ergo Sacramentum Veneremur cernui: Et antiquum documentum Novo cedat ritui: Præstet fides supplementum Sensuum defectui. Genitori, Genitoque Laus et jubilatio, Salus, honor, virtus quoque Sit et benedictio: Procedenti ab utroque Compar sit laudatio. Amen.</i>	Hence so great a Sacrament Let us venerate with heads bowed And let the old practice Give way to the new rite; Let faith provide a supplement For the failure of the senses. To the Begetter and the Begotten, Be praise and jubilation, Hail, honour, virtue also, And blessing too: To the One proceeding from Both Let there be equal praise. Amen.
---	--

The hymn is redolent with the concepts of ritual and tradition surrounding the Eucharist, and inherent in its text is a sense of awe and humility before God. The middle section, ‘Let faith provide a supplement/For the failure of the sense’, suggests the role of religious belief in accommodating, compensating for, and repairing the failings of human life. The specific suitability of this particular incipit for quotation in a work dealing with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is constituted in its connections with resurrection and transformation, as expressed in the liturgical, transubstantial rite of communion. Maxwell Davies used the *Tantum ergo* chant for an earlier work, *In Illo Tempore* (1965), in combination with another liturgical chant, *Eram Quasi Agnus* ‘I was like an innocent lamb’.⁴¹ This motet is itself inherently suitable for spatial investigation, given that the composer’s plot deviates from the story of the Last

⁴¹ *Liber Usualis*, 649.

Supper at several significant moments. Richard McGregor writes that the composer's 'use of *Tantum ergo* in this work is significant in that it lays the groundwork for later works in which some kind of symbolism or meaning is embedded in the choice of source material, and particularly where the choice of source and the processes applied to it are pertinent to an interpretation of the compositional idea expressed in the work.'⁴²

Figure 5.3 displays the chant melody as deployed in the function of opening ritornello (as discussed above) by Peter Maxwell Davies in the first bar of the cello part of *Sea Orpheus*.

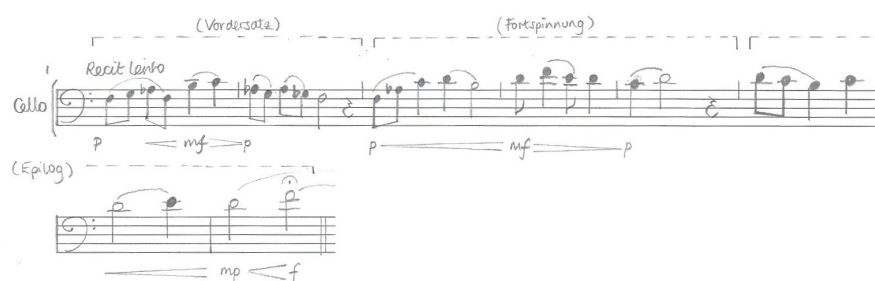


Figure 5.3: *Sea Orpheus* – bar 1

The strong tonic-dominant polarity of the incipit, along with its rhythmic structure, divide the chant melody neatly into three constituent segments, as indicated in figure 5.3. While the first and second of these arguably conform to the defining criteria of Fischer's *Vordersatz* and *Fortspinnung*, the final sub-section does not provide the tonal closure usually offered by the cadential close of an *Epilog*. Various parts (both whole segments, and smaller motifs) of the chant are used throughout the work, creating and maintaining a sense of coherence across its whole structure – see, for example, the opening melodic ascent through a minor third achieved through

⁴²Richard McGregor, 'Peter Maxwell Davies's sources: reflections on origins, meanings and significance', *Peter Maxwell Davies Studies*, ed. Kenneth Gloag and Nicholas Jones (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 165.

step-wise motion up by a tone and then a semitone, which provides the melodic shape for the solo flute's harmonics which overlay the first entry from the solo piano at bars 87 ff . (figure 5.4); the melodic contour of the *Vordersatz* which is paralleled in the top line of the penultimate section of the left-hand piano cadenza at bars 143 ff . (figure 5.5); and the first half of the *Vordersatz*, which is reprised in the piano in the final bars of the work, at 326-7 (figure 5.6).



Figure 5.4: *Sea Orpheus* – bars 87-90



Figure 5.5: *Sea Orpheus* – bars 143-6

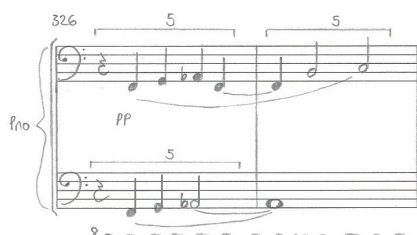


Figure 5.6: *Sea Orpheus* – bars 326-7

The full version of the chant ritornello recurs at three further points within the work, varied each time through re-composition in increasingly complex prolation canons. The first recurrence is at bars 32-44, in a canonic duet between solo viola and cello (figure 5.7). Here the cello takes the basic form of the *Tantum ergo* chant, transposed down a diminished fifth. The viola starts simultaneously at the twelfth note of the chant melody at its original pitch.

Figure 5.7: *Sea Orpheus* – bars 32-44

The first two notes are augmented and rhythmically altered (a dotted note with shorter partner, replacing two notes of equal duration) and then the original rhythm is resumed, placing the viola line approximately four crotchet beats ahead of the cello at this point (half-way through bar 34). Throughout the canon, the viola line is written in simple duple metre while the cello line employs quaver quintuplets in every bar, a technique which allows the cello to ‘catch up’ with the viola, so that by the final bar the cello is a mere quintuplet quaver behind. Both parts employ a two-bar rhythmically displaced version of the start of the final phrase of the chant melody (notes twenty-three to twenty-seven), with appropriate transposition in the cello part, to finish the canon.

At bars 75-85 the chant ritornello recurs in a much more complicated quartet arrangement played by solo first and second violins, viola and cello (figure 5.8). Here the cello starts one bar after the viola and second violin on the twelfth note of the chant melody, transposed down a minor third from its original pitch. As in the previous canon, this line is written in quaver quintuplets, allowing the cello to reach the end

of the chant melody (plus two-bar extension) by the end of the canon.

The musical score for *Sea Orpheus*, bars 75-85, is presented for four staves: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Cello (Vc). The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The score begins at bar 75. Vln I has a half rest followed by a half note B-flat, then a half note G, and a half note F. Vln II has a half note B-flat, then a half note G, and a half note F. Vla has a half note B-flat, then a half note G, and a half note F. Vc has a half note B-flat, then a half note G, and a half note F. The score continues with various musical notations including triplets, dynamics (p, f, mf), and a 'rit.' marking at the end.

Figure 5.8: *Sea Orpheus* – bars 75-85

The viola starts a bar ahead of the cello with the sixteenth note of the chant, transposed up a minor third from the original pitch, and continues in simple duple metre, reaching the end of the chant melody (plus two-bar extension) by the end of the canon. The second violin line employs crotchet triplets throughout, and starts one beat behind the viola, on the twenty-third note of the chant melody, transposed up through a compound diminished fifth. The rhythm here is varied from the original

version of the chant: the first two notes are augmented from quavers to crotchet triplets, the third note is diminished from a crotchet to a triplet crotchet bar quaver, the fourth note is slightly diminished from a crotchet to a triplet crotchet, and the fifth note is diminished from a minim to a triplet crotchet bar quaver. A new phrase begins after this, taking the first four notes of the chant melody in retrograde inversion, transposed up through a compound diminished fifth again with the same rhythm as the original chant. The final note of these four performs a dual role as the first in a re-statement of the first phrase of this canon, starting on the twenty-third note of the chant, still transposed up through a compound diminished fifth, and again rhythmically varied, this time with the first note augmented from a quaver to a triplet crotchet bar minim, the second note augmented from a quaver to a triplet crotchet, the third note is slightly diminished from a crotchet to a triplet crotchet, the fourth note is diminished from a crotchet to a triplet crotchet bar quaver, the fifth note is diminished from a minim to a dotted triplet crotchet. The next note is a repetition of the same pitch, transposed up an octave, and held until the end of the following bar. The final two notes in this canon, each augmented for four crotchet beats, are the final two notes of the original chant melody, transposed up through a compound minor third. The first violin part starts in the second bar of the canon, with the cello. The first two notes in this line sound an interval of a rising augmented fourth (that between the fourth and fifth notes of the chant melody) transposed up through a compound minor third, and augmented to four crotchet beats each. Following this the first violin picks up the chant melody in retrograde from the twenty-second note (in the original order), now transposed up through a compound diminished fifth, completing the series by the end of the canon.

Finally, the chant ritornello recurs in full for the last time at bars 205-213 to close the work's first movement, with the whole ripieno ensemble and the solo piano playing a melodically and rhythmically altered version of the chant material first in octave unison, and then in homophony (figure 5.9). A fuller discussion of the interpolation of the *Tantum ergo* chant and its paratextual connotations within *Sea Orpheus* follows in my spatial reading of the work below.

205

Pno

f molto

ff

Vlns.

f molto

ff

Vla.

f molto

ff

Vc.I

f molto

ff

Vc.II

f molto

ff

Db.

209

poco rit.

mf

p

pp

mf

p

pp

mf

p

pp

Figure 5.9: *Sea Orpheus* – bars 205-13

5.3 *Sea Orpheus: A Spatial Reading*

What follows here is my own, personal, spatially conceived, interpretation of *Sea Orpheus*, my understanding of the work as it makes sense to *my* ear.⁴³ Framing this reading is the concept of transformation, central, of course, to the Ovidian version of the Orpheus and Eurydice narrative, but highly relevant too on every level of the spatial analytical model, in Maxwell Davies's transformation of extant materials – principally Bach's fifth *Brandenburg Concerto*, the *Tantum ergo* chant, and Mackay Brown's poem, all of which contain their own internal transformations – and with regard to the speculative (though widely acknowledged) extra-musical resonance with the ongoing threat of global warming to the future of the Orkney Islands – the phenomenon documents a transformation of our climate, and is itself transformative in its effect; further, efforts to halt its devastation of our natural environment require a transformation in our attitudes and actions as members of an industrialized society. As with the readings of *King Priam* and *Job* earlier in this thesis, the analysis presented here will move freely between the three layers of the spatial model, and between the text and paratexts. The interpretative space delineated by this reading explores the synchronic deconstruction and reconstruction of the figure of Orpheus – considered as both poet and musician – and the parallel deconstruction and reconstruction of a musical tradition from Bach to Maxwell Davies within a single hermeneutic moment. As Hepokoski writes, 'our task [...] must involve locating a reasonable, relevant poetic narrative that would render possible

⁴³I am definitively not trying to impose this reading on the work in any lasting way; and I emphatically acknowledge, in line with the unique nature of spatial interpretations as defined by individual reader engagement, that my own reading is simply one possibility amongst a near infinite number of potential interpretations.

the parallel music-structural process, and we should do this without collapsing into naïve claims for a simplistic, consistently concrete representation or brashly excluding alternative narrative possibilities.⁴⁴

5.3.1 Prologue to the Analysis: A Word on Neo-Classicism

Peter Maxwell Davies describes the composition of *Sea Orpheus* as ‘quite a challenge [...] I’ve never done anything like this before, anything so resolutely neo-classical.’⁴⁵ Re-formulating the chronologically defined concept of neo-classicism within a definitively spatial framework, which eschews consideration of temporal antecedence and consequence and considers text and paratext within the same interpretative space, presents a certain challenge. The broadly accepted standard definition in the *New Grove Dictionary*, authored by Arnold Whittall, describes neo-classicism as:

A movement of style in the works of certain 20th-century composers, who, particularly during the period between the two world wars, revived the balanced forms and clearly perceptible thematic processes of earlier styles to replace what were, to them, the increasingly exaggerated gestures and formlessness of late Romanticism [...] Since a neo-classicist is more likely to employ some kind of extended tonality, modality or even atonality than to reproduce the hierarchically structured tonal system of true (Viennese) Classicism, the prefix ‘neo-’ often carries the implication of parody, or distortion, of truly Classical traits. The advent of postmodern sensibilities since the 1970s has made it possible to see neo-classicism not as regressive or nostalgic but as expressing a distinctly contemporary multiplicity of awareness. It is therefore difficult and even artificial to regard neo-classicism and postmodernism as separate except in historical sequence, with the former the preferred term for the period from World War I to the 1950s [...] As a generic term for specific stylistic principles, ‘neo-classical’ is notably imprecise and has never been understood to refer solely to a revival of the techniques and forms of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Insofar as

⁴⁴Hepokoski, ‘Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?’, 139.

⁴⁵Maxwell Davies, in conversation with Ruhe, ‘Preview: Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and Peter Maxwell Davies’ new “Sea Orpheus”’.

the movement had a slogan, it was ‘back to Bach’; yet it was less significant for its revival of traditional procedures than for the strength of its reaction against the more extreme indulgences of the recent past. It was the result of anti-Romanticism or anti-expressionism, yet the aim was not to eliminate all expressiveness but to refine and control it.⁴⁶

Within the spatial interpretative framework, the concepts of ‘revival’ and ‘replacement’ can be reformulated as ‘mirroring’ and ‘presentation of an alternative’ as the multiple texts in question are drawn into a single analytical space. In *Sea Orpheus*, Maxwell Davies was ‘looking for the forms and textures you get in Bach. It’s quite spare, not lush at all, and I imposed a kind of Bachian discipline on myself.’⁴⁷ He presents baroque ‘balanced forms’ – ostensibly a three-movement concerto structure mirroring the proportions of Bach’s fifth *Brandenburg Concerto* – and ‘clearly perceptible thematic processes’ – through which the chant ritornello is subjected to development, variation, and decoration (albeit through an anachronistic technique, prolation canons – though of course under the spatial paradigm these no longer appear anachronistic); there is also a strong sense of organicism with clearly evident motivic development and referentiality. Composed at the dawn of the twenty-first century, *Sea Orpheus* stands not as a response to ‘the increasingly exaggerated gestures and formlessness of late Romanticism’, but to the pluralism and diversity of style, media, and conceptualisation of music in this historical moment.

The spatial analyst approaches potentially neo-classical works from the point of view of a comparative investigation of two parallel texts/paratexts within the global superstructure of Western art music, which offer alternative harmonic paradigms –

⁴⁶ Arnold Whittall, ‘Neo-classicism’, *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed October 19, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/19723>.

⁴⁷ Maxwell Davies, in conversation with Ruhe, ‘Preview: Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and Peter Maxwell Davies’ new “Sea Orpheus”’.

‘extended tonality, modality or even atonality’ in contrast to conventional tonality – and varied formal, structural, and thematic ‘traits’. An extensive harmonic analysis of *Sea Orpheus* reveals a complex web of tonal structures, combining aspects of all three of Whittall’s neo-classical harmonic frameworks. With regard to variations in ‘classical traits’, the work combines small-scale details such as the use of harmonics (absent from Baroque and Classical works) in the solo flute and string parts, and the use of prolation canons rather than Vivaldian techniques for development and variance of the ritornello material, with larger-scale considerations such as the appendage of a programmatic title (and by association the content of Mackay Brown’s poem) to the work, and the possibility of defining the work’s structure in terms of the analytical concept of ‘multi-movement form within a single movement’ as propounded by James Hepokoski, Warren Darcy and Steven Vande Moortele, amongst others.⁴⁸ This theory was developed with reference to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, large-scale instrumental works which demonstrate a structure which encapsulates the various movements of a conventional sonata cycle within a single-movement sonata form, but is in fact applicable to a far broader repertory, stretching well into the twentieth century and, I would argue, the twenty-first century too. Vande Moortele writes: ‘A pattern of expectation for the formal course of the composition [...] is created only to be subsequently frustrated, and a specific composition derives its meaning from the interaction with the generic background against which it operates.’⁴⁹

⁴⁸Cf. Steven Vande Moortele, *Two-Dimensional Sonata Form* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009); James Hepokoski, *Sibelius: Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993); James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York/Oxford: OUP, 2006). I am especially grateful to Sarah Moynihan for discussion of this principle and for guiding my investigation thereof in relation to this work.

⁴⁹Vande Moortele, *Two-Dimensional Sonata Form*, 2.

As a partner work to Bach's fifth *Brandenburg Concerto*, *Sea Orpheus* seems at first glance to embody three-movement concerto grosso form; yet its three clearly discernible movements flow seamlessly to and from one another, it is at once in three movements, and in one. Its second sub-movement, pared back and mournful in character – embodying the contrast usually expected to be provided by a movement in this position in the work – develops motivic and harmonic material from the first sub-movement, demonstrating, albeit subtly, identifiable features of the development, or episodic middle section of a larger-scale global structure. The final sub-movement, while not explicitly recapitulating large swathes of thematic material from the work's opening, is inherently tied to the overall form through motivic development and referentiality, and the fact of its construction around the underlying material and idea of the *Tantum ergo* chant. Vande Moortele writes: 'In a two-dimensional sonata form [...] the point of departure is not the formal scheme, but a formal idea, more specifically the idea of combining the sections of a sonata form with the movements of a sonata cycle at the same hierarchical level within a single-movement form.'⁵⁰ This principle is evidently transferable to concerto form, and *Sea Orpheus* provides an interesting exploration thereof.

The definitive tenets of the spatial approach render temporally qualified labels, particularly seemingly paradoxical ones such as 'post-modern', unhelpful and irrelevant. Taruskin has described neo-classicism as 'a tendentious journey back to where we had never been',⁵¹ underlining the importance of understanding neo-classical works as presenting alternative, rather than responsive, artistic statements, which

⁵⁰Vande Moortele, *Two-Dimensional Sonata Form*, 196.

⁵¹Richard Taruskin, 'Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology', *19th-Century Music* xvi (1992-3), 287.

we are able to investigate in a common interpretative space, without concern for antecedence and consequence along a compositional timeline. Whittall's description of the *postmodern* view of neo-classicism – as neither 'regressive' nor 'nostalgic', but as displaying 'a distinctly contemporary [or modern(ist)?] multiplicity of awareness' – resonates with the reformulation of the post-war pastoral in a definitely *modernist* light, as embodying a preferable alternative to the unpleasant aspects of the present rather than a glorified distant chronological precedent. We might argue, then, that neo-classicism is at once modernist and *postmodernist*, providing further weight for the case against temporally construed qualifiers, and in favour of an alternatively conceived paradigm. At the very least, in considering *Sea Orpheus* and the fifth *Brandenburg Concerto* as paratexts existing in the same interpretative space, we are effectively ignoring the idea of an original and a responsive work, and thus terms such as *neo-classical* become less helpful simply on their own definitional grounds. The concept of a 'multiplicity of awareness', however, remains extremely useful for a spatial analytical investigation of *Sea Orpheus* given the innumerate references to the work's various paratextual sources; in this regard, in fact, the composer is mirroring his own technique in other works, which by virtue of this observation also come to stand as paratexts for the piece under investigation here. Whittall provides examples of such works, describing their mediation of extant material and ideas of subjectivity. He writes:

In such works as *Antechrist* (1967), *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969) and the opera *Resurrection* (completed 1987), Maxwell Davies acknowledged a substantial debt to Mahler and Berg, explicitly grappling with his sources, and creating disturbing dramas from the conflict between the evocative simplicity of survivals from the past and the complications of modern psychological perspectives. More consistently, however, at least in the extended series of symphonies and concertos that has dominated his output since the later 1970s, he has sought to establish a style which

is consistent in manner, and in which tensions between old and new are worked out below the surface, in aspects of the music's formal and harmonic organization which can seem aurally opaque.⁵²

Sea Orpheus arguably adds a further example to this repertoire, while simultaneously existing as part of the 'extended series of symphonies and concertos' in which 'tensions between old and new are worked out below the surface', as the following analysis will serve to demonstrate. The penultimate statement in Whittall's definition quoted above, '[neo-classicism] was less significant for its revival of traditional procedures than for the strength of its reaction against the more extreme indulgences of the recent past', leads to further confirmation of the appositeness of the spatial framework for the analytical investigation of this particular 'neo-classical' work, since the spatial model draws the *neo*-classical work, the classical 'traditional procedures', and the 'extreme indulgences of the recent past' into a common interpretative space, allowing for direct and in-depth comparative analysis, and resulting in a closer understanding of the refinement and control of 'expressiveness.' The idea of a spatial reconceptualization of the concept of neo-classicism seems particularly appropriate for a work which takes as a central thematic motif Orpheus's backward gaze.

5.3.2 *Sea Orpheus* and its Transformations

The conception of *Sea Orpheus* as a single movement work which encapsulates the multi-movement form of the baroque concerto facilitates spatial interpretation by encouraging synchronic perception across the work in its entirety. The most salient thematic material in the work – recurring either in direct statements, or more subtly as the foundation for motivic genesis – is the *Tantum ergo* chant incipit, which forms

⁵²Whittall, *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century*, 376.

the ritornello material for the first sub-movement of the concerto form, and underlies, albeit more opaquely, the remainder of the work, making a final explicit appearance in its last few bars. I read the chant as a reference to Eurydice's death, whose two occurrences in the Ovidian myth are conflated here, as in the Mackay Brown poem, into one, always already inevitable, passing.

In the first sub-movement of the work, the chant ritornello is transformed at each appearance, yet its essential character is essentially preserved, and remains a clear presence in each transformation (see section 5.2.4 above). This might be taken to be a musical expression of the varied language used to convey Eurydice's death at various points during Mackay Brown's poem – 'tide-raped girl', 'half enchanted now/To a cold mermaid', 'the drowning', 'her salt bridal'.

Perhaps taking a cue from Bach's derivation of episodic material from segments of the *Brandenburg* ritornello, such as the exploration of the *Fortspinnung* in the solo flute and violin parts in bars 21-9 (figure 5.10), and the elaboration of the *Epilog* in the harpsichord in bars 31-5 (figure 5.11), Maxwell Davies develops further melodic material from the sub-sections of the chant incipit (as exemplified in section 5.2.4), weaving the event of Eurydice's death throughout the work's narrative. Under the spatial paradigm, we know already that Orpheus's quest to save Eurydice will ultimately and inevitably fail; the recurrence of aspects of the chant throughout the work serves to confirm this, with ever-increasing intensity (in our aural experience) which, spatially, is always already inherent in the material itself.

The image displays a musical score for J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, specifically bars 21 through 29. The score is arranged in three systems, each containing four staves. The instruments are Flute (Fl.), Violoncello (Vcl.), and Organ (Org.). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is common time (C). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals. The first system (bars 21-23) shows the Flute and Violoncello playing a melodic line, while the Organ provides a harmonic accompaniment. The second system (bars 24-26) continues the melodic development. The third system (bars 27-29) features a more complex texture with the Flute and Violoncello playing a rapid, sixteenth-note passage, and the Organ providing a steady accompaniment.

Figure 5.10: Bach, Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 – bars 21-9



Figure 5.11: Bach, Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 – bars 31-5

It would be an oversimplification to characterize the solo instruments of the concertino variously as Orpheus and Eurydice, or as Hades/The Salt One, within the context of the music. However, the fact that the solo flute and violin do not play together until over halfway through the first sub-movement (at bar 124), and all three soloists do not play simultaneously until bar 162, and even then, for only two beats, cements the idea of separation and isolation from the very beginning of the work, mirroring the shift in focus of Mackay Brown's poem away from the happy beginning or the Ovidian myth and the Shetland ballad. While I do not suggest that the piano represents Orpheus throughout the work, it is possible to read the solo cadenzas (bars 136-50, and 163-77) as illustrating Orpheus' musical and rhetorical skill in appealing to Hades and Persephone; the derivation of the top line melody at bars 143 $ff.$ from the chant's *Vordersatz* links this appeal for Eurydice's restoration with the Eucharistic remembrance of Christ's resurrection. More broadly, the dialogic interaction between the soloists, and between the concertino and ripieno ensemble – already acknowledged as a defining feature of the concerto grosso genre – might be read as illustrative of

the exchange between text and paratexts, between past and present, reader and myth and music, in the collaborative process by which meaning is constituted, conveyed and interpreted in the work.

On the detailed micro-analytical level of the spatial analytical model, even a limited examination of Maxwell Davies's intricate deployment of motivic cells (of which there is only space for selected highlights here) reveals a mirroring of Bach's emphatic and crucial harnessing of ideas of growth and development – that is, *transformation* – in the fifth *Brandenburg Concerto*. A spatial purview on the second level of the analytical model maps this motivic work as a tool by which the sense of one overarching, global, single-movement structure is created and maintained. Four particularly prevalent motifs are traced here, to give a representative impression of the work's melodic and rhythmic construction, and its local level transformations.

Motif A, which consists of a dotted quaver followed by two demisemi-quavers (figure 5.12) is the single most prevalent cell, appearing in the same rhythmic form as follows: in the second violins (bars 2-3, 7, 30, 46-8, 68, 73, 96); in the violas (bars 5, 19-20, 22, 25, 46); in the first violins (bars 7, 26, 28, 31, 50, 55, 61, 68, 70, 73); in the solo flute (bars 7, 182, 184, 244, 281); in the solo violin (bars 49, 226, 228, 235, 273, 278); and in the left hand of the piano (bars 99, 313).



Figure 5.12: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif A

Several variants of motif A are also identifiable: an altered version consisting of a semiquaver, quaver, and two demisemi-quavers (figure 5.13) in the right hand of the piano (bars 163, 170, 172, 190, 197, 199), and in the solo violin (bar 287); an augmented variant on this altered version (figure 5.14) in the solo flute (bars 178 and

183); a diminished version of the basic motif (figure 5.15) in the solo flute (bar 233); and another altered version, in which the final two demisemiquavers are replaced with a triplet (figure 5.16) in the solo flute (bars 272, 274), which is deployed in retrograde in bar 275 (figure 5.17).



Figure 5.13: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif A variant



Figure 5.14: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif A variant



Figure 5.15: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif A variant

Figure 5.16: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif A variantFigure 5.17: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif A variant

Motif B, consisting of triplet semiquavers (an aural signpost to the *Brandenburg Concerto* paratext) followed by a crotchet (figure 5.18) appears in this basic form as follows: in the second violins and cellos (bar 4); in the solo flute (bars 13, 21, 124, 130, 132); in the violas (bar 51); in the solo violin (bars 64, 125, 127, 135, 151-2, 285); and in the piano (right hand – bar 101, left hand – bars 119-20).

Figure 5.18: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif B

Several further instances of motif B exist with two quavers in place of the crotchet – bar 72 in the second violins, bar 102 in the right hand of the piano, bar 154 in the solo violin – and still more with just one quaver (due to irregular metrical contexts): in the second violins (bars 3, 26); in the violas (bar 49); in the cellos (bar 112); in the solo flute (bars 127, 129, 133, 160, 178-9); and in the solo violin (bars 128, 131-3 – and in retrograde at bar 286). A further alternative variant, with a dotted crotchet in place of the crotchet, is used in both hands of the piano at bar 108.

Motif C, a quaver rest (on the beat), followed by three (usually ascending) quavers (figure 5.19), features only in the first sub-movement of the work: in the solo flute (bars 11, 14, 16, 123, 124); in the solo violin (bars 59, 124, 125); and in the cellos (bar 186). A variant, dotted version (figure 5.20) exists in the solo violin at bar 65; and an inverted version of the basic motif is to be found in the solo violin at bar 130.

While not as prevalent in the work as a whole as the other motifs mentioned here, this phrase performs an important role in pushing the music forward; yet its recurrence ties narrative moments together creating a cyclical ebb and flow of motion redolent of the lunar tide movements.



Figure 5.19: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif C

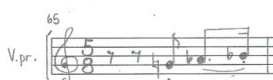


Figure 5.20: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif C variant

In particular, the manifestation through antiphony between the solo violin and flute in the fourth episode has a strong parallel in the dialogue between Bach's flute and violin that characterizes several of the episodes in the first movement of the fifth *Brandenburg Concerto*.

Motif D, two consecutive instantiations of a crotchet followed by two semiquavers, in a particular melodic configuration (figure 5.21), appears in its basic form as follows: in the solo violin (bars 47, 51, 72); in the solo flute (bars 158-9); and in a fragmented form in the piano (bars 94, 113-4).



Figure 5.21: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif D

A rhythmic variant (figure 5.22) features in the solo flute (bar 8); and a melodic variant (figure 5.23) feature in the solo flute and solo violin (bars 29 and 72 respectively). At bar 56 in the solo violin, and bar 100 in the right hand of the piano, a chain

of suspensions shadow the harmonic figuring of motif D in previous instantiations, creating the aural effect of the motif, even though its rhythmic format is absent here (figure 5.24).

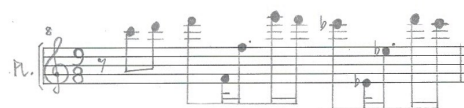


Figure 5.22: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif D variant

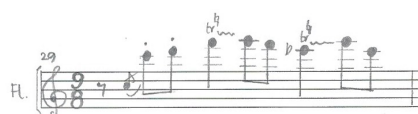


Figure 5.23: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif D variant



Figure 5.24: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif D variant

The left hand of the piano at bar 118 uses an inverted, rhythmically altered version of the motif (figure 5.25), and the solo violin at bar 280 plays a rhythmically diminished version (figure 5.26).

Figure 5.25: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif D variantFigure 5.26: *Sea Orpheus* – Motif D variant

The second sub-movement of *Sea Orpheus* (bars 214-246) presents a painfully beautiful, elegiac panegyric to Orpheus and Eurydice's love, which ends in an excruciating tear in the fabric of their being constituted by their eternal, permanent separation. Viewed synchronically, it is of no importance that this plotting of the narrative theme of parted lovers deviates from the story of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. What is important is that motivically, harmonically, rhythmically, contextually and intertextually, that is, in every conceivable respect, this idea – which we are invited to grasp through active engagement with the work's foundational mythology, rendered accessible through Maxwell Davies's music – underlies the entire work, it is always already present in the narrative presentation. The ripieno ensemble (save for two soli cellos), are tacet in this central section of the work (as they are in the *Brandenburg*), allowing the individual, interwoven lines of the concertino instruments to resonate without obfuscation, presenting the joy and the pain of Orpheus and Eurydice's love with simplicity and grace. The final sub-movement, continuing immediately on at bar 247, opens without the concertino instruments, delineating a space which absorbs the shock of the painful climax of the preceding moments, allowing the reader to react to the narrative in their own way, while the subjectivity of the myth's characters is temporarily muted by the devastation of their experience.

5.4 Conclusions

5.4.1 *Sea Orpheus* as a Symphonic Poem for the Twenty-first Century

Whittall writes that the ‘Wagnerian quality of folding the transcendent into the ambiguous is also [...] at the heart of Davies’s later music: there could even be some connection with the Wagnerian adaptation of Schopenhauer’s ideas about renunciation as a post-Christian form of redemption, in which the striving for transcendence is overlaid by a stoic sense of how humanity can find a degree of uneasy fulfilment in the world of nature. Just as Wagner was, for Nietzsche, “the tragic poet of the end of all religion”, so Davies seems to engage very directly with the issues that arise when matters of religious and political beliefs – especially those concerning culture and the environment – come into alignment, and conflict, with modern-day aesthetic imperatives.’⁵³ Might we productively describe *Sea Orpheus* as a twenty-first-century symphonic poem? And what interpretative, historical, cultural, and historiographical work might such a designation achieve? Once more, in conclusion, Hepokoski’s description of the genre in its late nineteenth-century manifestation provides a framework through which we might explore this question:

The explicit invitation is to interpret the musical processes in light of the provided paratext-complex, and this is the defining feature of the symphonic poem as a genre. The essence of a *symphonische Dichtung* is situated in the listener’s act (anticipated by the composer’s) of connecting text and paratext, music and nonmusical image, and grappling with the implications of the connection. The genre exists, *qua* genre, solely within the receiver, who agrees to create it reciprocally by indicating his or her willingness to play the game proposed by the composer; it does not exist abstractly in the acoustical surface of the music [...] The verbal clues that the composer furnishes are givens within the genre. They are neither extramusical (because they are part of the essential character of this musical procedure) nor dispensable, neither accretions

⁵³Arnold Whittall, “‘A dark voice from within’: Peter Maxwell Davies and modern times’, *Peter Maxwell Davies Studies*, 11.

nor casual overlays.⁵⁴ Whether a program was introduced into a symphonic poem before, during, or after its composition is historically interesting but aesthetically unimportant to the intended transaction between producer and receiver. The fact remains that at the moment of a symphonic poem's 'official' presentation we are confronted with a title, epigram, or set of poetic lines, and no knowledge of a paratext's dating grants us the license either to dispense with it or to banish it to an aesthetic periphery [...] These works, by definition, seem to insist on an inferable simultaneity – perhaps even a metaphorical identity – between their musical and 'literary' narratives.⁵⁵

In the spatial analytical investigation detailed above we have, explicitly, 'interpret[ed] the musical processes in light of the provided paratext-complex'. Particularly apt here, is Hepokoski's emphasis of the reader's role in creating the meaning of the symphonic poetic work, and in defining it as such a work through the act of engaging with it on its own terms. The programme for *Sea Orpheus* is an absolutely integral part of the work, it is, as Hepokoski asserts, neither 'extramusical', nor superficial; it inheres in, and emanates from the mythological materials and their specific musical reification. Finally, the assured suitability of the spatial framework under which this twenty-first-century symphonic poem has been investigated is indicated by the idea of 'an inferable simultaneity – perhaps even a metaphorical identity – between [the work's] musical and "literary" narratives' – the demand for synchronic, spatial perception and interpretation is immanent in the work itself.

⁵⁴Cf. Carl Dahlhaus, 'The Idea of the Musically Absolute and the Practice of Program Music', *The Idea of Absolute Music* [1978], trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 128-40; 'The Twofold Truth in Wagner's Aesthetics: Nietzsche's Fragment "On Music and Words"' [1974] in *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 19-39; 'Program Music and the Art Work of Ideas', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 360-8.

⁵⁵Hepokoski, 'Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?', 136-7.

5.4.2 *Sea Orpheus* as Allegory for Global Warming

Peter Maxwell Davies's anxiety about global warming, and the particular threat that climate change poses to his adopted homeland of the Orkney Islands, has been well-documented in relation to his 2008 chamber work *Last Door of Light*. The composer himself wrote of this work, which, like *Sea Orpheus*, has a crucial paratext in a poem by Mackay Brown:

In his poem 'Thorfinn', George Mackay Brown describes his sea-death as a turn of a "salt key in his last door of light": I imagine a slow spinning through "Long green currents of water,/ Sunk to the root of seaweed and/ In cove of shells settled". My home, on one of the most northerly Orkney Islands (off the north coast of Scotland), is right on the shore, where I walk the dog for miles, in total isolation each morning and evening. Just close by the house are two small uninhabited islands, with the scattered remains of a tiny medieval church – here are reputed to rest the bodies of hundreds of sailors snared on the rocks through the ages – indeed, there are still many traces of boat wreckage from the last two centuries. We know that with climate change, the house will sooner or later be drowned – most of the large, flat island is due to disappear. The present work is a meditation on such individual and communal vulnerability, though it is by no means a completely negative one: we know we must all enter that last door of light: and the way to it is, intermittently, also full of light.⁵⁶

Given this acknowledged concern for the future of the Orkney Islands under the pending threat of rising sea levels, expressed through a work which might productively be considered as a further paratext for *Sea Orpheus*, given that it too utilises a fragment of plainchant (in this case *Lumen conigionis* – light of knowledge) which is subjected to various metamorphic processes over the course of the work, we might legitimately read the latter work as a similar invective against the dangers of this global atmospheric transformation, and a compulsion to consider and change our own actions as (albeit unwitting) agents of this phenomenon. The fifth stanza of

⁵⁶Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, 'Last Door of Light – Composer's Note', *maxopus.com*, available at: http://www.maxopus.com/work_detail.aspx?key=316

Mackay Brown's *Sea Orpheus* alludes to the negative environmental impact of the shipbuilding industry on the River Clyde, referencing the alteration of avian migration patterns: 'gulls/Climbed up the Glasgow sky/Rivet in beak'; and we might read Maxwell Davies's (and Mackay Brown's) figuration of Eurydice as a personification of the Orkney Islands, drowning, and lost forever under the water. Interpreted by this light, Orpheus' absence, as the everyman inhabitant of the islands, is easier to understand. Under the spatial paradigm, the flooding of the islands is inevitable, presenting an emotively compelling case for action.

5.4.3 Closing the Case for the Applicability of Spatial Form Analysis to Instrumental, Non-dramatic Music

As demonstrated in this chapter, the tenets of spatial form musical analysis can legitimately and productively be applied to instrumental music which is not conceived to accompany any kind of dramatic stage presentation, whether through spoken or sung drama, or dance. *Sea Orpheus*'s 'paratextual apparatus', to use Hepokoski's terminology – but with an expanded application to include the various sources discussed here, rather than just the work's title, taken from the Mackay Brown poem – is of paramount importance to the reader's access to, and understanding of, the work's hermeneutic potential. Hepokoski asserts:

To write today under the automatic assumption of the aesthetic superiority of autonomous music (or, stated more cautiously, of music that asks to be perceived as autonomous) seems dated, as if one were unwilling to release oneself from the grasp of the system that one is attempting to explain. In practice, restriction exclusively to either a privileged musical or verbal sphere of discourse proves inefficient, if not naïve. For us, and probably for the late nineteenth century as well, the two commingle in ways that it would be unwise to separate: the form-creating element is synonymous

with the form per se – with the form as narrative process, a thing in motion.⁵⁷

That is to say, the musical language and structure of such a work as *Sea Orpheus*, and its verbal paratexts, are mutually dependent, and *must* be examined within a single interpretative space. Inherent in both is a strong sense of narrative; and these narratives must be reconciled within one inclusive hermeneutic paradigm.

Examined under the spatial interpretative framework expounded in this thesis, Maxwell Davies's *New Brandenburg* work emerges as an evocative exploration of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, translated from and through its Ancient Greek, Roman, Shetlandic and twenty-first-century Orcadian contexts. It stands as a musically realised disquisition of ideas about love and loss, to which the engaged reader is enabled to relate either in a straightforward way in the sense of romantic or familial love, and the pain caused by the death of a loved one, or in an allegorical mode with regard to the threat posed by man's impact on the natural environment. In *Sea Orpheus* the foundational mythology mediates the reader's understanding of these painful aspects of life, rendering him/her able to assimilate and respond individually to what s/he has encountered, to the 'unattainable stability and serenity' towards which the composer was perhaps striving, whose very unattainability is highlighted by the composer's own spatial interaction with his materials. The individualistic nature of the impact on the reader of this definitively interactive experience should not be underestimated.

⁵⁷Hepokoski, 'Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero?', 141.

Part IV

Conclusions

Chapter 6

Epilogue: Final Reflections on Spatial Mediation

[The Shetlandic Orpheus ballad] points to an origin for music and for all the arts that has nothing to do with concert halls, art galleries, and salons set about with tapestries and jars [...] Modern culture for many people is perhaps a substitute for something rooted deep in human nature – the instinct and the impulse to reverence the unknowable [...] a primitive atavistic urge – but all the same to unite ourselves with the power that moves the stars, by the offering of our best skills and gifts, so that we may share and celebrate what providence has to give in the way of food, clothing, fire, as well as the loveliness we are dowered with from birth to death. It is a mutual courtesy of giving and taking. – George Mackay Brown.¹

Max Paddison writes of Adorno's 'dilemma of modernism' as 'the predicament faced by the artist caught between, on the one hand, the traditional demands of the artwork for unity and integration (the harmonious relationship between part and whole) and, on the other hand, the loss of faith in any overarching unity on both individual and social levels in the face of the evident fragmentation of modern existence.'² It is easy to see how this dilemma emerged in the first half of the twentieth century, following the utter devastation of the Great War. A hundred years later, Adorno's dilemma seems sadly more relevant than ever, in a twenty-first-century social context characterized by a heightened degree of isolation experienced by individuals in a global community scarred and fractured by divisions predicated on race, religion, class, sex, age, culture, and ideology. These divisions are ironically strengthened and rendered more dangerous by the forced coexistence of conflicting worldviews on a global stage

¹Mackay Brown, *Northern Lights*, 270.

²Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture*, 52.

created and maintained by the increased immediacy of communication across vast distances enabled by technological development.

The mediating function of mythology, as illuminated in this thesis through the definitively *spatial* interpretative framework, enables the identification of points of confluence, of commonality, in this difficult individual existence. The application of the spatial paradigm to two works from the mid-twentieth century demonstrates its success in offering an alternative conceptualization of unity, enabling coherence to be constructed and interpreted in a different way, thus resolving Adorno's dilemma. Its application, in Part III, Chapter 5, to a twenty-first-century work composed and initially performed in a decidedly different context, demonstrates the broader applicability of the model not only to works composed outside of the (potentially) modernist remit, but also to works not tied to any staged drama, extending the insights revealed through its application to an operatic work in which the music is inseparable from the dramatic action unfolding on the stage in Part II, and through its application to a work in which there is no sung drama, but which is inseparable from the danced drama with which it was designed in complement in Part III, Chapter 4.

The spatial form analytical methodology adapted from Joseph Frank's seminal literary theory and developed in relation to musical works based on ancient mythology in this thesis manifested itself as a spark of inspiration after over a year's in-depth research on *King Priam*; it grew out of sustained contemplation of the work's musical communication of its mythological content within the context of its various paratextual sources, and thus is best described as emanating directly from the work under study. Initial investigation of *Job* and *Sea Orpheus* revealed very quickly the similarly emphatic suitability of the spatial framework for their analysis, and the analyses presented in Chapters 2-5 illustrate fully the demand for synchronic spatial

perception inherent in these works, and, I would argue, in the broader repertory of which they are representative.

King Priam emerges from its spatial interpretative analysis as a musico-dramatic enactment of a narrative trajectory which mediates the various and contrasting political and social extremes of a twentieth-century landscape. The opera facilitates the reader's interaction with, and processing of, potentially painful aspects of human existence through the creation and maintenance of sufficient distance to circumvent disfiguring emotional trauma. It demonstrates the continued viability of tragic narratives in our modern world, offering a mediation of the utopian vision through a musically effected rupturing of mythological plot from story which shapes the reader's identification with and response to the materials with which they are presented.

It is possible to read in Tippett's second opera a critique of what might be described as a lack of progress in the two and a half millennia spanning the distance between the work's foundational mythology and the opera's first performance at Coventry in May 1962; the common experience of military conflict and associated gross loss of life is drawn into sharp relief by the spatial superimposition of the Greek myth and the British opera within one common interpretative space. We might thus read the opera as a direct challenge to nineteenth-century progression narratives, and it is here, amongst other aspects of the work, that we may in part identify *King Priam*'s modernist credentials. We might additionally interpret the opera as a meta-critique of Continental modernism: it offers the spatial reader the opportunity to engage with a mythologized vision of a common, collective humanity in which they might take comfort from the sense of isolation so characteristic of modern society, translated through a simultaneously modernist, yet recognisably tonal, musical language.

The spatial analysis of Vaughan Williams's *Job: A Masque for Dancing* offers rich new understandings of what might superficially be considered a fairly straightforward work, composed in a subservient role simply to accompany a ballet scenario. Prominent amongst these insights is the idea of charting the narrative's various characters, as they are depicted in Vaughan Williams's music, as manifestations of the myriad aspects of human existence. The work emerges from its spatial analytical investigation as a definitively modern pastoral, a compelling indictment of the complacent nostalgia of pre-war British society. The profound questions relating to the nature of faith, and the relationship between humanity and God, raised by the biblical *Book of Job*, are mirrored in both Vaughan Williams's music and William Blake's *Illustrations to the Book of Job*, and these issues are highlighted and foregrounded through paratextual comparison of these three works, and their concomitant analysis with regard to the extra-musical contexts in which the ballet music was composed and has since been received, as drawn into parallel within a single interpretative space.

From a disengaged standpoint, the mythological narrative of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's *Sea Orpheus* might perhaps seem absent, superficial, or at best obscured. Application of this thesis's spatial analytical framework to the work, however, reveals a kaleidoscopic series of transformations of Greek Orphic mythology, displayed in parallel in its Shetlandic and Orcadian poetic and musical instantiations; a transformation of Bach's fifth *Brandenburg Concerto*, carrying with it the tradition of Western art music of the preceding two and half centuries; and a series of transformations of the *Tantum ergo sacramentum* chant incipit, representative of two millennia of Christian Eucharistic ritual. All of these elements are synthesized within the work's structural design and musical language, and a full understanding

of the piece can only be achieved through a spatial interrogation which considers it alongside its various paratextual sources within a single interpretative paradigm.

Sea Orpheus appears from out of this spatial investigation as a musically reified allocution on the very real and immediate threat to the natural and man-made environments posed by climate change in which we are able to read Eurydice as representing Maxwell Davies's beloved Orkney Islands, and the strikingly elusive figure of Orpheus as their everyman inhabitant (perhaps the composer himself, allegorized here as a spatial reader engaging with his various narrative materials). Whether or not we subscribe to this reading of the work, *Sea Orpheus* undoubtedly stands as an eloquent disquisition of the human experiences of love and loss (of an individual, or a home), to which the reader is able to relate at several levels of metaphorical remove.

Details of the spatial analysis of all three works treated in detail in this thesis help to elucidate proposed political readings, demonstrating the role of myth in the construction of historical and political narratives, and the potential for social commentary in art works conceived of under the twentieth-century modernist paradigm. *Sea Orpheus* contributes to its composer's extended campaign to raise awareness of the dangers posed by global warming, and more broadly of the need to acknowledge the severity of man's potential impact on the natural environment, and the ramifications thereof. On both an intimate personal level, and more publicly, *Job* encourages the reader to question their faith, and the collective faith of their community, and, in a more abstracted sense, the meaning of faith in the modern world. *King Priam* was, according to Kemp, written 'principally in order to repudiate Marxism – to show that the "inevitability" of the communist utopia will always be

subverted by (non-economic) factors beyond the control of man's best instincts';³ the reading in Part II demonstrates that this critique is perceptible from the reader's perspective irrespective of speculation as to Tippett's particular compositional intent.

The experience of mediation which the engaged spatial reader undergoes as a result of their interaction with these artworks is simultaneously cathartic and motivational. With *King Priam* we are offered the opportunity to engage with conflict in a variety of different forms, and on all scales, from the squabbling and bickering of brothers in the domestic sphere, to the horror, devastation, and loss of life inherent in global war. Priam's resignation to and acceptance of his own death provides the requisite transcendent *katharsis*, but we are simultaneously compelled to question the status of armed conflict as all too often the solution of choice for global political and social disagreement. Job's restoration, always already inevitable under the spatial framework, provides respite for the engaged reader from his seemingly inexcusable suffering at the hands of a malevolent God, and we are concomitantly mandated to question our own faith, beliefs and/or morals, and the meaning of faith in contemporary society. *Sea Orpheus* offers *katharsis* through the opportunity to engage with mythological death and mourning, and by paratextual association at the very least, the inevitable failure of resurrection in all but euphemistic terms, in order to reach a point of acceptance from which we might move forward; yet simultaneously urges us to consider the implications of our own actions in order to pre-empt, and thus avoid, such a loss.

³Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*, 326.

To summarize the methodological gains of the spatial analytical framework, then, I would focus on four main points. Firstly, the emphasis on synchronic, rather than diachronic, perception removes the burden of preoccupation with chronological sequence, and thus avoids the associated hierarchy in which older manifestations of the same essential material are considered to be more authoritative, leading to the identification of the oldest, originary source. This leaves the reader free to explore referentiality outside of the frames of linear, temporal progression and teleological imperative, and allows him/her to compare and consider a number of instantiations of the same (mythic) material on equal footing. By extension, the spatial model thus allows us to draw parallels, or contrasts, between narrative events within the work, and between moments or features of the work and aspects of its extramusical context, without an automatic relationship of causality or influence determined singularly by relative chronological placing. Following on from this, the multi-level spatial methodology mandates extramusical consideration as a fundamental component of analytical inquiry, tying historical, cultural, contextual and technical analytical investigation and interpretation together within one comprehensive framework.

But finally, and crucially, all three of the spatial analytical case studies propounded in this thesis emphasize the paramount importance of the reader in *creating* as well as interpreting the meaning of these works. This is the fundamental tenet of the spatial approach advocated here, and amongst all other insights unique to a spatial engagement with these works and their foundational mythologies, this is the most distinct. This mediation of the eternal tension between the universal and the particular is focussed through the identification of the reader with the central protagonist of each respective mythological narrative through his dual characterization as ‘everyman’, and as a spatial reader of the events of his own

narrative life.

George Mackay Brown, author of the *Sea Orpheus* poem, writes: ‘A blight on much modern art is an all-pervading snobbery and elitism, and the cult of personality [...] We should think rather of art as being, in Thomas Mann’s words “anonymous and communal”: a whole community contributes to the making of a poem, the poet is only the person who first utters the dance of words through a mask.’⁴ This idea of collectivity of authorship, and thereby ownership, the communal experience of creating meaning within a work of art, and the sense of a community formed by all those interacting with a specific piece, resonates strongly with the personal ideology through which the spatial form methodology is developed and applied in this thesis, created by the author, as an engaged spatial reader of *its* texts and paratexts. The sense of identification with a collective body and the creation of a communal art work encompasses the crucial grouping of text(s) and paratext(s) within the common interpretative space, and amasses the innumerate possibilities for individual reader interpretation and creation of meaning within any specific artwork.

In final conclusion then, the spatial interpretative paradigm, and its associated methodological framework for analysis of musical works, encourages a vibrant, concentrated focus on transformations, at every level, and in every constitutive sphere of the works under interrogation – external transformations of paratextual content, internal transformations of musical and narrative detail, mediating transformations of aspects of the universal and the particular, and a transformation in both the reader (as a result of the interpretative process) and the work (as a result of the

⁴Mackay Brown, *Northern Lights*, 270.

meaning *created by* the interpretative process). As a contribution to musicological scholarship, it mandates acknowledgement of the mutual interrelation of historical and historiographical study with analytical investigation by demonstrating both their interdependence and the interpretative benefits of their mutual consideration in the act of engagement with musical works.

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